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Andrey Vasilchenko

REICH SOLDIER

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THE DESTRUCTION OF THE TANKOVON OF THE REICH ELITE

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In early 1945, Hitler made one last attempt to turn the tide of the war and avert ultimate catastrophe on the Eastern Front by ordering a large-scale offensive in Western Hungary to drive the Red Army across the Danube, stabilize the front line, and hold the Hungarian oil fields. By the beginning of March, the German command had concentrated almost the entire armored elite of the Third Reich in the Lake Balaton area: the SS Panzer divisions Leibstandarte, Reich, Totenkopf, Viking, Hohenstaufen, etc. - in general complexity up to 900 tanks and assault guns.

However, the monstrous blow of the 6th SS Panzer Army, which was supposed to sweep away the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, was met by the most powerful anti-tank defense and did not reach the goal. Subsequently, even the Germans themselves admitted that the Soviet anti-tank artillery acted exemplarily in this battle. The ten-day battle ended with the most severe beating of Hitler's last combat-ready reserves - the Germans lost about 400 tanks and up to 40,000 people in the Balaton area. After this crushing defeat, the German army finally lost the ability to conduct offensive operations.

Until now, the domestic reader could judge the Balaton operation only from Soviet sources. In a new book by a well-known historian, this battle is shown for the first time from the German side — having studied all available literature, relying on operational documents of the Wehrmacht and the memoirs of German soldiers and military leaders that have never been translated into Russian, the author analyzes in detail the course of hostilities, examines the tactical miscalculations of the Germans. the Mane command, because of which the initially successful operation ended in complete failure, depriving Hitler of his last hopes for a more or less acceptable outcome of the war.

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Foreword

It is traditionally believed that the Hungarian Lake Balaton is known for its healing waters and excellent wines. Pretty sure that's the way it is. Now, on the shores of this lake, which is only an hour's drive from the Hungarian capital airport, there are small resort towns that have long been chosen by the Germans and Austrians, and the shores between them are built up with luxurious mansions.

More than 60 years ago, these shores were also chosen by the Germans and Austrians, but by no means for resort purposes. In early 1945, fierce tank battles took place on the shores of this unclear lake. In Russian historiography, they remained as the Balaton defensive operation, and for the Germans - as the last offensive in the history of the Third Reich.

Despite the fact that Soviet historiography considered the Balaton defensive operation of 1945 "short in time, but exceptionally dynamic and saturated with stubborn battles", along with the Kursk defensive battle, "an example of high organization and skillful conduct of operational defense by Soviet troops in during the Great Patriotic War", she was not very willing to pay attention. West German historiography also bypassed it, preferring to leave this topic at the mercy of historians of the so-called "revanchist trend".

As a result, a certain historical vacuum arose around the battles at Balaton. In Russia, they tried to saturate it at the beginning of the 21st century, but all the works published on this topic did not actually rely on German documents, from which it becomes clear how and why the last aspirant

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The Third Reich's offensive ended in a virtual military disaster, despite the fact that almost more tank divisions were concentrated in Western Hungary than on the entire Eastern Front.

In general, the Battle of Balaton is important for the domestic reader, if only because it helps to understand the conditions under which the attack on Vienna was carried out. In addition, the Balaton defensive operation became an indirect guarantee of the success of the Vistula-Oder offensive, as well as the penetration of the Anglo-American allies into the territory of Germany.

Part 1

ON THE ESTIMATE OF THE LAST OFFENSIVE

Chapter 1

THEATER OF WAR IN HUNGARY IN THE WINTER OF 1944/45

At the end of December 1944, Army Group South, with the forces of three armies (2nd Panzer, 6th and 8th), with the participation of the 3rd Hungarian Army, after heavy defensive battles associated with huge losses, was gradually forced to surrender their positions. The powerful Soviet offensive launched by the Red Army in the summer of 1944 effectively severed the connection between Army Group F, located in the Balkans, and Army Group Center, based in Poland.

At that time, the front passed north of the Drava River, south of Nagykanizsa, to the southwestern shore of Lake Balaton (Platensee), passed along its northwestern shores to the southeastern end of the Bakony forest and the Vertesh mountains, following the Danube to Grana (Esztergom), passing along the river Gran of the same name to the north and northeast, where it reached the Slovak borders just northeast of the town of Banska Bystrica. This section of Europe became the stage of the "war theater", where one of the most fierce battles of the Second World War broke out between Lake Balaton, Budapest and Vienna. It is about him that will be discussed in this book.

The course of the battle was greatly influenced by the local relief, which was determined by the hilly Dunantul plain, stretching to the west of the Danube. Under Dunantul in

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generally understood as Western Hungary, located to the west and south of the Danube current. The total area of this area is about 32 thousand square kilometers.

On the German side, the main character in this military tragedy was at first the GU Panzer Corps of the SS, which was part of the 6th Army (Army Group Balka), and then, together with those transferred from the Western Front | and P SS Panzer Corps was to become part of the 6th Panzer Army (6th SS Army). Within the framework of this task force, there were six of the most eminent SS divisions, which formed the core of the Waffen-SS. In addition, the 1st cavalry corps, the 3rd tank corps (Bright's corps group) and the 2nd Hungarian army corps took part in the battles near Balaton. On the other side of the front, in Budapest besieged by Soviet troops, the X SS mountain rifle corps, consisting of four German divisions (two army and two SS), as well as the remnants of the 1st Hungarian army corps, was left to perish.

Before turning to the actions of the 6th Panzer Army, it is necessary to consider the causes of its occurrence. Hitler gave the order to form it back in September 1944. It is possible that already on September 12, 1944, he summoned Colonel-General Jodl, Chief of the Wehrmacht Operational Command Headquarters, to whom he gave this order. At the same time, Colonel-General of the Waffen-SS, SS-Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich, who commanded the 5th Panzer Army there, recalled from the Western Front. He is placed at the head of a tank army that has begun to take shape. To his successor, Manteuffel, Dietrich gave a very confusing explanation of his new appointment: "The Führer thinks that I will be more useful in the Motherland than on the battlefield."

The documents of the Wehrmacht High Command also mention the date of formation of the 6th Panzer Army. On the one hand, it is said that the 6th Panzer Army should be formed in order to take part in the Ardennes operation. "It takes about 800 trains to

to deliver the 6th Army (since November 8, the 6th Panzer Army, commanded by SS Oberstgruppenführer Sepp Dietrich), which includes the 1st, 2nd, 9th and 12th SS Panzer Divisions, as well as a training tank division." At about the same time, the following entry was made in the combat log of the Wehrmacht High Command: "Since January 1945, the 6th SS Panzer Army." Why, as follows from the documents of the Wehrmacht command, two 6th armies appear simultaneously (the second was part of Army Group South), remains unclear. Given the nature of the German army and the emphasis placed on subordination and discipline, the possibility of error or mere malpractice can be immediately ruled out in this case. Most likely, this confusion was intended to misinform Soviet intelligence. In any case, since November 8, 1944, the official name "6th Tank Army" has been used in all army documents. In the documents that came out of the depths of the SS, a slightly different name is used - "6th SS Panzer Army". At least, such a phrase was actively used until the winter of 1945. There is an urgent need to explain why, at the end of the war, two designations were used to designate the same operational-tactical formation - "official" and "actual".

In this case, the main source of information may be the combat log of Army Group South. It always uses the designation "6th Panzer Army". For this reason, later in the book, this "official" designation will mainly be used to designate the 6th SS Panzer Army. This will preserve the style of the cited documents without misleading the reader. Thus, whenever the 6th SS Panzer Army is mentioned, the 6th SS Panzer Army must be referred to. This detail is given such great attention, if only because during the described events in the Army Group "South" there were two 6th armies, each of which took an active part in the battles: near Balaton. Do not forget that in the battles in Western Hungary participated

another 6th Army is the Soviet 6th Guards Tank Army.

But back to the formation of the 6th Panzer Army. It proceeded at a fast pace. The actual date of its creation is September 24, 1944, that is, 12 days after Hitler gave his order. Hitler himself was constantly interested in the progress of the formation of this formation, so to speak, "kept his finger on the pulse." This army mainly consisted of units that were intended for fighting on the Western Front. The command of the 6th Panzer Army itself was composed partly from the headquarters located in northern France and Belgium, and partly from the headquarters of the KhP army corps. All staff officers were placed at the disposal of the Waffen-SS. The result was a "mixed" army headquarters, in which the number of army officers significantly exceeded the number of SS men.

Lieutenant General Gauze was appointed chief of staff of the army. At first he was engaged in the formation of an army in the Heilbronn region, then in the vicinity of Bad Salzuflen. But in this field, he did not have time to excel. In November 1944, he was appointed Commander-in-Chief of the newly formed "cadre army" (20th Army). Major General of the Waffen-SS, SS Brigadeführer Kremer, came to his post from the General Staff of the Ground Forces. He held his post until the end of the war. The army staff officers who led the individual operational groups (1a, 1c, 1a) were Waffen-SS officers who had been educated at the military academy of the German General Staff. Army officers were chiefly in charge of supply departments. A significant part of the units of the 6th Panzer Army consisted of purely army employees. These were reconnaissance and supply units, a cartographic bureau, artillery and sapper units. The only exception was the SS division Leibstandarte. Only employees of the Waffen-SS served in it. All units accompanying the tankers in it consisted mainly of their own officers. Some memoir sources point to a strange close relationship between the Waffen-SS and the rest of the clans.

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troops. The fact is that in Western Hungary there were also headquarters of communications units of military aviation - the Luftwaffe, the navy (Danube flotilla) and the Royal Hungarian troops - Honved. In the operational sense, almost all of them were subordinate to the command of the army.

Despite the fact that the 6th Panzer Army turned out to be such a "motley mixture", many noted that the relations between the soldiers of the Waffen-SS, Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe, navy and Honved were almost flawless. This can also be explained by the fact that, in terms of their mentality, the Waffen-SS soldiers had long been integrated into the "active army", for them the barriers between the SS and army circles ceased to exist. Infantry General Tippelskirch, who acted as an impartial witness in this situation, noted about this relationship: "On the battlefields, one could always note good, even comradely relations between the army men and the SS."

A feature of the fighting in Western Hungary was the border that ran between Army Group F operating in the Balkans and Army Group South fighting in Slovakia and Hungary. This was no ordinary seam between two adjacent army groups fighting against a common enemy. In fact, it was the border between two military worlds, which were called the High Command of the German Land Forces and the High Command of the Wehrmacht. The entire Eastern Front from Finland to Slovakia was subordinate to the High Command of the German Land Forces, which Hitler headed from 1941. The situation on the Western and Southern fronts was the responsibility of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, which Hitler ruled as "the Führer and Commander-in-Chief of the Wehrmacht." The transfer of military units from one front to another was associated with enormous problems, which led to tense relations between the two High Commands.

There was a traditional struggle of competencies for the Third Reich. As a result, all the conflicts that broke out were forced to settle personally by Hitler. Basically, he had to smooth out uneven corners in relations between the

Colonel Guderian (then Chief of the High Command of the German Land Forces) and Colonel General Jodl, who was Chief of Staff of the High Command of the Wehrmacht. The fact that Hitler acted as an arbiter between them looked somewhat strange. But, apparently, the incredulous Hitler was very satisfied with the role of mediator and arbitrator. He, as the Supreme Commander-in-Chief, deliberately created all sorts of obstacles and conflict situations, creating overlapping structures. And if, at first glance, such a practice did not have obvious negative consequences, then its indirect: the negative impact was obvious. The higher army officials could not make a decision promptly. Almost any, even a minor military issue required the personal intervention of the Führer. In other cases, it was about the tasks entrusted to a separate battalion. Their approval took a lot of time, which in the end was not enough for more important things. As a result, Hitler, as Supreme Commander, began to feel the ever-increasing burden of unresolved military issues, from which he preferred to distance himself.

The Soviet command did not know such problems. In most cases, strategic and tactical issues were resolved as quickly as possible. Moreover, this applied to almost all levels of command, from the lowest to the highest. Of course, there was rivalry in the Red Army in the conditions of war, but it was very quickly eliminated. This also applied to the attack on Budapest, which seemed to be specially located at the point of contact between the two German army groups. It is inherent in the very nature of things to pay less attention to secondary issues, showing more interest in solving the main problems. During the war years, such a decision also largely depended on the coordination of actions of the "neighbors on the front". After the Red Army entered the Balkans, the Headquarters had no problems coordinating the actions of the armies of the new allies - Romanians and Bulgarians. In all their actions they were directly subordinate to Moscow.

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The German troops and their remaining allies, the Hungarians, did not have such a unified command. The reason for this lay in the very personality of Hitler, who, in the name of strengthening his own power, encouraged in every possible way the rivalry between the two Supreme Commands: the ground forces and the Wehrmacht. For the most part, such management models were forced to pay for the headquarters of the armies, subordinate to the corresponding High Command. Even German authors, far from sympathizing with Soviet Russia, were forced to admit that the "Russian model" of command during World War II was far more effective than the German one. This can be seen most clearly in the example of the battle for Budapest.

In general, the appearance of SS tank units in Western Hungary is associated precisely with the battle for Budapest. Until that moment, the IV SS Panzer Corps (consisting of two divisions - the 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" and the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking") was part of the 2nd Army. In 1944, he had to endure three fierce defensive battles that took place in the vicinity of Brest-Litovsk and Warsaw. At the end of December 1944, this SS Panzer Corps was on the Eastern Front along the Vistula-Narew line, just north of Warsaw. But soon Hitler became interested only in Budapest. Tippelskirch recalled that on the evening of December 24, 1944, Hitler ordered the urgent transfer of the SS corps from East Prussia to Hungary. "And this despite the fact that the weakening of the East Prussian front was very risky." The GU Panzer Corps of the SS was reinforced by the 96th and 711th Infantry Divisions, which, together with the tankers, were to go to Hungary.

Meanwhile, the Hungarian capital found itself in the ring of Soviet encirclement. The ring around Budapest was closed in the Grana area. It was at this time that Colonel General Gu-

ÿ A detailed description of the Battle of Budapest can be found in Andrey Vasilchenko's book One Hundred Days in Bloody Hell. Budapest - "Danube Stalingrad"?

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Derian felt the wrath of Hitler. This was partly due to different views on the major military operation that Germany was to conduct in the Ardennes. When Guderian realized that he was not destined to dissuade the Fuhrer from organizing this military adventure, he began to insist in every way that the offensive in the western direction should begin as early as possible - 5 m. He began to demand that | | It started November 16th. Colonel-General Heinz Guderian This date of the offensive in the west still somehow made it possible to carve out free military units and cover the Berlin direction, which was actually open to the Red Army. But Hitler did not even think to heed the commander's demands. As a result, the offensive in the Ardennes began a month later, on December 16, 1944. As is known from history, it did not lead to any more or less significant results. As a result, Guderian not only did not receive the units necessary to strengthen the front, but also lost the last reserves that were sent from the banks of the Vistula to Hungary. Colonel General Rendulich described the situation as follows:

"During the offensive in the Ardennes, the set operational goals were not achieved. However, this battle was able to slow down the Allied advance for a while. However, their advance resumed on January 13, 1945. Their offensive at the Eifel only hastened our end. The day before, on January 12, 1945, the Russian winter offensive began, as it developed, they managed to achieve significant success. This happened not least due to the fact that the last free German reserves were

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foxes are directed to the West. But from the West, where these forces were supposed to participate in the Ardennes operation, they were transported to Hungary, where in the last days of December 1944 a serious struggle for Budapest unfolded. If the situation on the Western Front had any noticeable effect on the course of the war, then the Ardennes Offensive became its catastrophic expression.

After Germany had lost the last operational reserves in the West, Guderian almost ceased to hope for the stabilization of the Eastern Front. It was problematic even for a while to hold back the Soviet offensive in Poland. The withdrawal of an SS Panzer Corps and two infantry divisions from Poland shocked Guderian. In particular, he was annoyed by the fact that this measure was carried out even without consulting him. Such behavior of the Fuhrer could be regarded not only as a personal insult, but as a vote of no confidence expressed to the Colonel General. Guderian himself described these events as follows:

"December 25th. On the first day of the Christmas holidays, I was returning by rail back to Zossen (before that, Guderian was at Hitler's Headquarters in Ziegenberg. - Auth.). While I was on the trip, behind my back, Hitler ordered that the SS corps under the command of Gille, with its two SS divisions located north of Warsaw, be transferred to Budapest to relieve this city. It was the reserve of the Reinhardt army group. Reinhardt is also very disappointed by this irresponsible act, which weakened an already stretched front. No objections or protests had any effect. For Hitler, the release of Budapest was much more important than the defense of East Germany. When I asked to justify this step, he referred to foreign policy reasons and actually kicked me out. Of the 14 and a half tank and motorized divisions that were in reserve for defense against the Russians, 2 went to the neighboring front. There are 12 and a half divisions left - and this is for 1200 kilometers of the front.

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Indeed, it was planned to send two divisions to the reserve [At the SS Panzer Corps, which Guderian spoke about. The army reserve even began to form in accordance with the order

Hitler, but they did not have time to fully fulfill it. For some time the corps was still on the Eastern Front in Poland. Apparently, the arrival of infantry reinforcements was expected. The then chief of staff of the IV SS Panzer Corps, Obersturmbannführer Waffen-SS Schoenfelder, wrote about this: "Colonel-General Guderian believed that the order had already been almost fulfilled." On Christmas Eve, the loading of the cars of the first echelon, which was heading to Hungary, began. |

Why Hitler chose the IV SS Panzer Corps to carry out this difficult and, in fact, thankless task, is not so difficult to answer. This choice was directly related to the personality of the corps commander General of the Waffen-SS, SS-Obergruppenführer Gille, who during the battles near Cherkassy and Kovel gained fame as a legendary personality. General of the Waffen-SS Steiner recalled on this occasion: "The commander of the IV Panzer Corps, General of the Waffen-SS, said that he himself had once been in the boiler and, therefore, like no one else knows what courage his surrounded comrades need. For this reason, its units deliberately went to break through the encirclement around Budapest. To better understand these words, let's look back a few months ago. In mid-February 1944, Gille, with a powerful tank throw, breaks through the encirclement ring, in which two German armies fell near Cherkassy, they manage to pull them "to freedom". And some time later, Gille, along with his headquarters, finds himself in a cauldron. He held positions near Kovel from March 19 to April 4, 1944, until he, along with the division, was rescued from the encirclement. During his stay in the cauldron, Gille resolutely rejected the possibility of surrendering. As a result, by the winter of 1944/45, Gille was considered one of the largest specialists in releasing encircled German units. This he was to do in Budapest.

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It was reported by radiogram to Budapest that [the SS Panzer Corps was being transferred to the garrison of the "Budapest Fortress", but in order to get to the Hungarian capital, it was necessary to break through the ring of Soviet troops. Gille's name was supposed to inspire hope in every German soldier stationed in Budapest, from the private to the garrison chief Pfeffer-Wildenbruch. Given the hopelessness of the situation in which Budapest was located, this psychological device could inspire the defending Germans and Hungarians to new achievements. Hope was supposed to help them endure physical and psychological stress, encourage them to fight to the last bullet. In those days, they still did not know that Hitler was not going to rescue them from the encirclement - Budapest had to be held, and Gille did not go at all to release, but in order to join the ranks of the Budapest garrison himself. This time Gille's tank corps was unable to break through the ranks of the Red Army. -

Breaking through the Soviet encirclement would be theoretically possible if the Soviet positions were attacked from two sides: from the outside and from the inside. External forces were clearly not enough to carry out such a task. Moreover, every day the units of the Red Army tightened the encirclement. The encircled German units were strictly forbidden to leave Budapest, and therefore, there could be no question of a massive strike in one place - this would mean leaving most areas of the Hungarian capital. In this situation, Hitler's order was in effect, which forbade leaving previously occupied territories. It should not be forgotten that Hitler at the end of the war was literally obsessed with Hungary. The liberation of Budapest and the assertion in Western Hungary became for the Führer a kind of *idéfex*, a mania. All his deeds and thoughts were subordinated to her. He constantly talked about foreign policy considerations, about the need to protect the last sources of oil located in Hungary and Austria, without which (after the loss of Romanian oil) the continuation of the war was pointless. Against the background of the preservation of oil, Hitler did not consider it necessary to reckon with other regions, including the Upper

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Silesia and the Saar region, which had rich coal deposits. For Hitler, the loss of these regions, indispensable for German industry, meant nothing.

compared with an attempt to consolidate on the Danube open spaces. One got the impression that Hitler was afraid of losing Hungary as the last ally in World War II. In this difficult time, he was concerned about international prestige (what kind of prestige could we talk about at that time?) It is possible that for this reason he was more concerned about the territories south of Vienna than the German lands proper.

The first echelons with units [At the SS Panzer Corps began to arrive in Raab (Győr) in the last days of 1944. They were immediately placed under the command of the Army Group Balka (actually the 6th Army). The 96th and 711th Infantry Divisions arrived a little late, literally on the eve of the offensive. Arriving, they immediately went to their original positions, preparing to join the fight.

Chapter 2 "PAULA" OR "CONRAD"?

Even before the arrival of the SS and infantry divisions, the High Command of the Ground Forces, the headquarters of the Army Group South and the headquarters of the Army Group Balka began to develop plans for the release of Budapest. Based on all the opinions expressed and the considerations presented, two plans were developed that seemed to be the most realistic. One of them was called the "northern solution" - the Konrad plan, the second was respectively the "southern solution" - the Paula plan. The time factor played a decisive role in their implementation. Until the units of the Red Army were able to gain a foothold, to replace the divisions that suffered losses in battles with fresh units, there was a hypothetical opportunity to strike from the west and release the Hungarian capital with the forces at the disposal of Army Group South. It was taken into account that the Soviet troops were concentrated on the maximum possible capture of the city.

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However, this did not mean that the Soviet command missed the opportunity to strengthen its units opposing the Balka army group. Marshal Tolbukhin from the very beginning foresaw the possibility of attempts to break through the encirclement from the outside. Under these conditions, time did not play on the Germans at all - the success of their operation largely depended on their efficiency and the accelerated adoption of the plan.

What point of view Guderian adhered to remained a great secret. Although it was no secret to anyone that he was thinking primarily about strengthening Army Group Center, and therefore all other theaters of military operations did not play a special role for him. Moreover, he experienced something like a military antipathy for certain military operations. The Hungarian operation also belonged to those. He considered Hungary an insignificant theater of operations, which, by the will of the Führer, took away too much time and effort, without removing the main threat that hung over Germany. It is precisely this that can explain a certain cowardice that manifested itself in those days in the High Command of the Land Forces and the General Staff of the German Land Forces. However, it is possible that it was a general apathy that seized literate people who saw the hopelessness of the situation.

It is also possible that on December 24, 1944, Guderian personally discussed the situation with General Balk of the Armored Forces, who had just been appointed commander of the 6th Army (Army Group). This could most likely have happened at the headquarters of the High Command of the Ground Forces in Zossen, a town lying south of Berlin. It is known that in the course of the conversation the colonel-general spoke openly about his fundamental disagreements with

Hitler and Jodl. The two generals had a lot in common - both were well acquainted from the days of their service in the Reichswehr, both were hunters who had land near Goslar. It is interesting to note that Balk, despite the impression this conversation made on him, honestly believed on 26 December 1944 that Budapest could be "saved". Balk generally looked at things somewhat differently. He was basically

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I do not agree with Hitler's order, which was given to the commandant of Budapest in early December 1944. The first paragraph of this order was: "By order of the Fuhrer, Budapest must be defended to the last house." In this situation, this meant that the battles had to be fought to the last bullet, until at least one German soldier was alive. In the end, almost exactly what happened.

The plan to attack the Soviet troops from the west, restore the front up to the Danube and again completely control Buda (the western district of Budapest) was extremely simple, but at the same time too optimistic, and taking into account the balance of forces available - and not at all real. However, there was no unity of opinion on this issue in Army Group South. There was not even unity regarding the goals and objectives of the upcoming military operation. The daily report of December 27, 1944, spoke of "strengthening the defense of Komorn (Komárom) through the use of the first arriving transports with units of the Gille corps." On the one hand, this spoke in favor of the "northern solution", although, on the other hand, the command insisted on the urgent use of [At the SS Panzer Corps, whose arrival still had to be awaited, unless this was .

However, the very next day, the order signed by the commander of Army Group "South" (it was entered in the combat log) stated: "On December 28, 1944, when visiting the command of the 6 - nie for the release of Budapest. The most effective is the "southern solution" ("Paula"), that is, an offensive to the northeast from Stulweisburg (Szekesfehevar). The possibilities must be explored and the results reported to the army group."

It should be noted some nervousness of the command of Army Group "South" because of the haste in preparing a military operation. It is understandable, haste could harm the success of the operation. The command faced a difficult choice, and each of the decisions made could lead to unpleasant consequences. had to answer

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difficult questions: is it necessary, without waiting for the arrival of echelons with divisions, to hastily launch an offensive against a supposedly weak enemy? Or is it better to wait for reinforcements and launch an offensive after its thorough development against the relatively entrenched and replenished reserves of the Red Army? The second option meant that it was necessary to lose at least (2-3) days. In addition, one should not forget that the longer the preparation for the offensive lasted, the less unexpected it would be for Soviet intelligence.

The "Southern Solution" ("Paula") provided for the possibility of an offensive between Lake Balaton and Szekesfehevar, when the blow was delivered to Budapest from the southwest. In this variant, the terrain on which the offensive was to be carried out was comparatively favorable for the actions of tank units. But at the same time, numerous rivulets and streams, which ran just across the direction of the proposed attack, acted as natural barriers. However, this decision was attractive, if only because if the offensive was successful, not only would Budapest be released, but the Red Army units occupying positions west of the Hungarian capital would also be under the threat of encirclement. With all this, the Paula plan had a number of significant drawbacks:

- 1) The starting positions were 80 kilometers away from Budapest, which was much more than in the "northern solution". As a result, tanks and armored vehicles would need much more fuel to overcome this distance. |

- 2) It took more time to reach the starting positions than for a "diretissima" style operation. As a result, the Soviet troops had a certain amount of time to strengthen their defenses.

3) During the implementation of Operation Paula, the German advancing grouping would have had too extended flanks, which would have caused the natural desire of the Red Army units to counterattack precisely in these weak places. For this reason, a significant number of infantry and anti-tank guns would be required to strengthen the flanks.

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4) The more the advancing German units deviated to the south, the more chances they had to collide during the battles with the reserves of the Red Army, which would take time to pull up to the north. In the case of the "southern solution", the German units would have gone towards them.

In the case of the "northern solution" ("Konrad"), the tank wedge emanating from the area southeast of Komorn, was supposed to move in the direction of Budapest along the territory passing between the Danube and Tata. That is, in this case, the onslaught was to be carried out in the southeast direction, where the Red Army had the weakest positions and the thinnest isthmus between the main front line and the surrounded Budapest. In this case, the tank offensive would be combined with an attack on the rear of the Soviet fleets, which could lead to the recapture of part of the Danube banks. It was assumed that this simpler solution required significantly fewer forces, since in the first phase of the military operation it was not necessary to cover the left flank, and a simultaneous attack along the Danube itself would be sudden, that is, the effect of surprise could play its role. .

With all this, the starting positions for the operation "Konrad" were very slightly removed from Budapest itself, which would have saved the fuel consumed by the tanks. In addition, the operation could be started 2 days earlier than it was envisaged for Operation Paula. Parts would not have needed to be brought up separately to their original positions, since such was the front held by the Balka army group. To enhance the effect of a surprise attack, it was decided to start the operation at night without artillery preparation. The disadvantages of this solution were the following points:

1) The area was not ideal for the use of tanks. During the offensive, it was necessary to overcome the Vertesh and the Gerech mountains adjoining them from the north. But this inconvenience could be reconciled, since control of the Danube implied the opening of new opportunities, and as a result, as the offensive developed, only a passage through the Pilis Mountains would have to be.

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2) As a result of the passage through the mountains, it was possible to stretch the advancing units into a narrow column, which was very unsafe, since as a result of the counterattacks of the Red Army from the flanks, it could be cut into several parts. The deployment of tanks on a wide front was difficult, as it required speed of action. This was possible only in the event of a successful breakthrough through the forward positions of the Soviet troops.

3) In these conditions, infantry or mountain infantry troops were more suitable for breaking through Soviet positions, but by no means tanks.

In this case, the time factor played a key role in the decision. On December 30, 1944, the German High Command of the Land Forces ordered the start of Operation Konrad, i.e. on the choice of the "northern solution". At the same time, as a diversionary maneuver south of Szekesfehervar, the offensive of the forces of the 3rd Panzer Corps (commanded by General of the Armored Forces Bright) was to begin. The start of the operation was scheduled for 19:30 on January 1, 1945.

Apparently, the command of Army Group South did not have a very good idea of the situation at the front and therefore harbored unrealizable hopes. On December 31, 1944, the following entry was made in the combat log: |

"The trip of the commander to the command post of the 6th Army (Balka group). After the "northern solution" ("Konrad") was approved by the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces on December 30, the available options are being studied at the command post of the 6th Army. At the same time, no new information was revealed. The progress of the case allows us to hope that:

a) the transports will arrive in a planned manner;

B) ammunition and fuel will be delivered in a timely manner and in sufficient quantities;

c) the general situation on the front in the area of the army group will not undergo fundamental changes (strong onslaught on the 8th army).

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If we assume that the commander of Army Group "South" made such reservations only after a conversation with the commander of the 6th Army (Group Balka), and even 24 hours before the start of the offensive, then one can imagine under what conditions had to act [At the SS Panzer Corps. Actually, the unsatisfactory situation with transport supplies in Army Group South was not a special secret. And by December 31, 1944, it could hardly have changed overnight.

A completely different picture emerges in the memoirs of Guderian, who did not hide his doubts and skepticism about the possibility of a successful outcome of this military operation: "Hitler had high hopes for this offensive. I was filled with skeptical forebodings, since too little time was allotted for the preparation of the operation. In the units, as well as in the command itself, the former enthusiasm was no longer felt.

The question naturally arises, what was the reason for the absence of the "former inspiration" and was it not just a post-war slip of the tongue of a person who already knew how everything would end? If this was true of the Balka group, then it was by no means the GU Panzer Corps of the SS. The then head of the headquarters of the tank corps, SS Obersturmbannführer Schoenfelder, in his notes made after the war, assessed the situation in those days as follows:

"Both assessments (of the Army Group and the 6th Army) on the possibility of an offensive by the army group Balka and the reality of the release of Budapest took into account all the pros and cons, weighed all the pros and cons. Only after that the preference was given to the "northern solution". Only this plan could be correct due to the fact that:

a) we were pressed for time;

B) the defense of Budapest could be broken any day;

c) the northern starting positions were closest to the goal of our operation.

We had to come to terms with the seasonal conditions and peculiarities of the territory, which made it very difficult for a tank wedge to advance. Despite the correct assessment

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situation, both Army Group South and Army Group Balka were still trying to flirt with the "southern solution". Some wanted to implement it at all costs, others only indirectly. Despite the tempting prospects that opened up in the event of the successful implementation of the "southern solution", two facts could not be discounted:

a) a very limited number of own troops, which had already been in heavy defensive battles for several months;

B) planned for the winter of 1944/45, the Soviet attack on Vienna with forces significantly superior to our own. For the enemy, Budapest was only a temporary factor,

milestone on the path of a great offensive.

At the same time, Gille himself was not going to postpone the offensive. His [Wu SS Panzer Corps was to infiltrate Budapest. To achieve this goal, he planned to use all the forces that were at the disposal of the Balka group. But such behavior did not at all contribute to establishing a dialogue, and even more so, mutual understanding between Gille and Balk.

So, the situation became even more complicated, since there were several military "authorities" in the same theater of operations:

- General Wöhler, appointed commander of the 8th Army, was a kind of expert in Hungary, but the management of Army Group South was entrusted to him only on December 23, 1944, that is, 8 days before the offensive;
- General of Armored Forces Balk, who was new to this sector of the front;
- Waffen-SS General Gille, who arrived from Poland only on the eve of the offensive.

As we can see, the operation was planned literally on the go by people, most of whom were not at all familiar with the specifics of the hostilities in Hungary. The situation was complicated by the personal animosity that existed between Balk and Gille. Later, Balk was somewhat one-sided and biased in describing the nature of such strained relationships. They were a legacy of the past. To this was added the

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the fact that Balk himself did not receive the long-awaited post of commander of Army Group G, which fought in the West. This post went to a very talented Colonel-General of the Waffen-SS Hausser. Balk regarded his appointment to the role of commander of the army group in Hungary as an obvious demotion. The situation was not even corrected by the "healing balm poured on his wounds" - after all, the 6th Army was called only the army group after him. In his memoirs, Balk did everything possible to maintain his reputation, distancing himself from Hitler (whom he actually had great sympathy with) and considering his "demotion" as the result of the intrigues of the Reichsführer SS Himmler: "When on December 23 I sat down dinner, a call came from the High Command of the Ground Forces. I had to urgently arrive in Zossen. I flew by plane. Within 24 hours I was to take command of the troops around Budapest... Later, Guderian, who sympathized with me, swore that I had fallen victim to Himmler's intrigues."

Nevertheless, on the Western Front, Balk faced not only the "intrigues" of Himmler. He himself wrote: "My relations with the commander of the Western Front, Field Marshal Rundstedt, were more than strained." Balk himself characterized the field marshal as an old man who remained in the role of commander during the First World War. These details are given here to show that Bulk was trying, if not to defame, then at least to "kick" everyone with whom he could not work well. He did this without regard to personality. This, perhaps, is the reason for his by no means businesslike reasoning, which during the war only caused harm. The root of the problem lay in his psychological makeup. In complete contrast to the statements in the memoirs is a letter that Balk sent on October 10, 1944 to Colonel General Jodl. In it, he reported on the poor condition of neighboring military formations, while not forgetting to mention his own exceptionally talented command - apparently, he did not expect this letter to end up on Hitler's desk. This document is sufficient.

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so that the suspicious Hitler refused to appoint Balk as commander of one of the western army groups. Himmler's intrigues were by no means required for Balk's "exile" to Hungary, although the role

this politician should not be underestimated. Meanwhile, the "carousel of resignations" in the Third Reich was turning faster and faster.

Hitler, who since 1943 had an extremely low opinion of his generals and the General Staff, began to interfere in the most insignificant details of military operations. Every time the operation ended in failure (after 1944, there were more and more such cases), he came out in a nervous cry, taking out his annoyance on the generals. He himself contributed to the fact that the generals lost confidence in him, and he, in turn, "lost faith" in his commanders. The extent of the Fuhrer's distrust of this or that general depended on the particular individual, as well as on the actions that he took. In the end, months later, Balk and Gille became nothing more than lightning rods. But more on that later. So, on New Year's Eve 1945, Operation Konrad started, more like some kind of fortune-telling - no one knew how and how this operation would end.

Chapter 3 OPERATION CONRAD

The command of the GU Panzer Corps delivered divisions and battle groups in many echelons. On December 25 they began their journey through Silesia. The trains arrived in Hungary via Slovakia, stopping at the gap between Raab and Komárom. SS Obergruppenführer Gille was the first to arrive at the starting positions. He rode ahead of everyone with Chief of Staff Schoenfelder and a small task force covering the car. To get acquainted with the plan of operations, he arrived at the headquarters of the Balka army group, which was located in Martinsberg (Gyorsenmarton), 10 kilometers southeast of Raab.

The situation on the front held by the Army Group "South" (primarily by the army group Balka), according to

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niyu on January 1, 1945 was as follows. On the segment between Balaton and the Danube, the Soviet troops, who continued to launch attacks in order to break through to Mor (Mur), suffer heavy losses. In the remaining sectors of the front, to the north and south of the Danube, Soviet troops are being regrouped in order to continue the offensive... The newly intensified attacks on Budapest are turning this region into the main object of the Eastern Front. Bloody battles go on every day.

At that moment, the command of Army Group "South" did not know about the real balance of forces in this sector of the front. The command did not even know the location of the Soviet divisions. Balk had very limited information, and therefore he assessed the balance of forces of his 6th Army and the Soviet troops as follows:

"The German side is represented by seven tank divisions, two cavalry divisions, four infantry divisions. Hungarian units, which in most cases cannot be considered as a decisive factor in the battle, are represented by four infantry and one cavalry divisions, as well as the remnants of a number of Hungarian units ... On the Russian side, we are opposed by fifty-four infantry divisions, five mechs - lowered corps, three tank corps, two cavalry corps, four anti-aircraft artillery divisions, seven anti-tank brigades, three mortar brigades.

Even from this information it was clear that the advantage was clearly on the Soviet side. But the command of the Army Group South continued to hope that in the "weak" place, where the German troops would strike, the advantage (due to the maximum concentration) would be on their side. But the situation was very unfortunate. By the start of the attack. Both SS Panzer divisions were not fully equipped with equipment and personnel. The second infantry division did not have time to drive up either. Presumably

1 This refers to Soviet units, including those involved in the storming of Budapest.

it was assumed that all echelons would arrive on the second or third day of the German offensive. In fact, the infantry division did not arrive until the fourth day of the offensive. The remaining echelons with equipment arrived with the composition of tank divisions on the fifth day of the offensive. On the sixth day of the offensive, the Hungarian battle group, which consisted of three infantry battalions, was connected to the operation. And only on the seventh day of the operation, the tank and infantry divisions transferred from Poland were able to take part in Operation Konrad. On the segment between the Danube and Lake Balaton, the German units were opposed by the 4th Guards Army, which consisted of thirteen rifle divisions, and a mechanized corps. At the same time, Marshal Tolbukhin had a mechanized corps, a rifle division, as well as special "reinforced units" in reserve. The latter were abundantly supplied with grenade launchers, artillery and anti-tank guns. Besides. The 4th Guards Army could at any moment receive the reserves of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, namely: the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps, the 18th Tank Corps, and the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps. At the same time, 953 aircraft supported units of the 4th Guards Army from the air.

Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin (center) with subordinates

„ The Commander-in-Chief of Army Group South, General of the Infantry Otto Wöhler, arrived at the command post before the start of the offensive [At the SS Panzer Corps, which was located in Ach (a town 8 kilometers southwest of Komorn). Wöhler strove to personally follow the progress of the operation, not limiting himself to reading reports sent from division commanders. On this occasion, it was written in the combat log: "The commanders of the SS divisions "Dead Head" and "Viking" are also present there. No fundamental remarks are made. There is confidence in the troops and their commanders. Annoyance is caused by the delay of the transports with the SS division "Viking". The hope is expressed that they are deceitful. maneuvers regarding the site of the alleged attack will take effect. Balk himself, apparently, was not present here. Where he was at the time of the start of Operation Konrad is unknown. In his diaries and memoirs, he also did not say anything about this.

The concerns about transport problems proved to be justified. The situation of the German troops was, if not catastrophic, then very bad. As mentioned above, the first echelons with subunits of three divisions arrived at their original positions before the start of Operation Konrad. But if you look at the staffing of these divisions, then as of January 1945 she looked like this:

- 3rd SS Panzer Division "Dead Head". Of the 77 echelons, only 51 arrived. The staffing level is 66%.

- 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking". Out of 87 echelons, only 28 arrived. The staffing level is 32%.

- 96th Infantry Division. Out of 46 echelons, only 20 arrived. The staffing level is 32%.

Although much fewer echelons were required to transport an infantry division than to transport tank divisions, the trains did not arrive until the fourth day of the offensive. And this is provided that the transportation of infantry is much faster than heavy tanks. And such divisions, which in fact were supposed to take the brunt of the Soviet

troops were fully equipped only on the fifth day of the offensive! In order not to completely lose the battle, already existing forces were thrown into the battle [At the SS Panzer Corps. As a result of such a decision, they had to fight, as it were, "at half strength".

The transfer of divisions from Poland was completed only on January 7-8, 1945, that is, at the moment when the defense of the Soviet troops was so strong that the idea of ending Operation Konrad arose by itself. At the same time, it should be noted that postponing the start of Operation Konrad by a couple of days could change the balance of forces not at all in favor of the Red Army.

Meanwhile, the situation in Budapest was in danger of becoming critical. The ring of Soviet encirclement tightened around the Hungarian capital more and more. It became clear that the supply of Budapest by air (the practice of "air bridge") was clearly insufficient to allow the German-Hungarian grouping to repel the attacks of the Soviet troops. A transport sent along the Danube with 400 tons of cargo (mostly fuel and ammunition) ran aground about 15 kilometers north of the Hungarian capital.

And now, relying on the combat log, we will analyze the operation "Konrad" by day.

January 1, 1945 (Monday). First day of Operation Konrad

Despite the fact that the operation officially began only on the evening of January 1, 1945, it actually started on New Year's Eve. It was then that the 1st Panzer Division (PI Panzer Corps), reinforced with new tanks, and infantry regiments, supported by tanks, launched a diversionary offensive in the area of Yoshi along the northern shore of Lake Balaton (approximately 22 kilometers west of Szekesfehervar). The offensive was not successful, as the tanks were helpless against the clearly superior forces of the Soviet infantry. Nevertheless, this diversion had an effect. The command of the Soviet 4th Guards Army decided that the offensive, undertaking

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captured on its left (southern) flank, aimed primarily at Szekesfehervar. A version was put forward that the Germans were planning to take this city in pincers. The appearance of the IV SS Panzer Corps on the front did not hide from Soviet intelligence, but they did not know where and when it would be thrown into battle. But let us turn north to the place of the main German

hit.

"Temperature - 3 °C, cloudy, light snowfall. The condition of the roads is unchanged."

Such a temperature and frozen roads did not at all contribute to the start of a military operation. But the night offensive came as a "surprise" for the Red Army units. The war diary of Army Group South reported: "The evening of January 1, 1945. 19 hours 30 minutes. The Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps (3rd SS Panzer Division "Dead Head", 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" and the 96th Infantry Division) launched an offensive from the area east of Komorn.

Despite the fact that ice floes were floating along the Danube, and the engines of assault boats were constantly breaking down, units of the 96th Infantry Division under the command of Major General Harrendorf still managed to land on the southern bank of the Danube. Actively using engineering and sapper units, the German infantrymen managed to fortify themselves on the coast in two bridgeheads.

Despite the drifting ice floes, the appearance of the 96th Infantry Division in the area of Dunaalmash came as a complete surprise to the enemy. Nevertheless, he managed to block the southern bank of the Danube with groups of tanks. Bridgeheads have been established south of Motz and at Nyergeshuifalu. This may allow the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" to break through to the southern bank of the Danube. Parts of the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" penetrated into the area east of Nesmey, where they are fighting fiercely with enemy tanks and infantry blocking the southern bank of the Danube. The 5th Viking Panzer Division took Bay, Agostian and Somod.

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In Agostiana, tankers from the Viking liberated about a thousand German and Hungarian soldiers who had fallen into Soviet captivity. The divisional group Pape (III Panzer Corps), located on the right flank, began its offensive with an hour delay: "20 hours 30 minutes. Parts of the 3rd Panzer Corps launched an offensive against Felsjogalla. On the right flank and in the center of the offensive, the outskirts of Banhid were quickly reached. On the left flank, the group came across mine and anti-tank barriers located 500 meters from Alsheyogalla.

The unexpected offensive allowed the German units to break through the first line of Soviet defense very quickly. It must be said that even the prudent Marshal Tolbukhin did not expect such a powerful German counterattack. Soviet reports reported:

"On the night of January 2, 1945, the German units, without preliminary artillery preparation, launched a swift offensive and by morning were able to penetrate the positions of the 31st Guards Rifle Corps, whose soldiers did not have time to dig trenches in the frozen ground ahead of time. At the same time, the enemy launched a parallel attack across the Danube in the direction of Schutte. In the morning, the troops entered into battle with the enemy in the direction of the main attack. So far, it has not been possible to eliminate the deep invasion."

Meanwhile, Army Group South is receiving an unencrypted message from Budapest. It says that the encirclement ring is steadily shrinking. The attacks of the Red Army soldiers follow one after another. The German command concludes that the Red Army must take Budapest as soon as possible in order to move on Vienna and Munich. The beginning of one of the operations "Konrad"

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Generally speaking, the command of the IV SS Panzer Corps could be satisfied with the results of the first day of the offensive. But you shouldn't have been too delusional. The surprise effect quickly wore off. The Soviet command knew where the Germans would try to unblock Budapest. The further success of the German operation depended largely on how quickly the remnants of the three divisions, which had not yet arrived, would be brought into battle.

On the night of January 1 to 2, in order to continue the offensive, it was ordered to "break open the Soviet defenses in the mountains and on the southern bank of the Danube."

January 2, 1945 (Tuesday). Day 2 of Operation Konrad

"Temperature from — 4 °C to — 6 °C; windy, cloudy sky. The condition of the roads is unchanged.

At dawn, units of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" were able to move deep into the Soviet positions, reaching the northern part of the Vertesh Mountains, where they came into contact with the Gerechsky Mountains. Despite moving forward, the German tankers failed to make a deep breakthrough. Anti-tank barriers, artillery fire and Soviet infantry defense lines in depth caused many difficulties for the Vikings. Waffen-SS Sturmbannführer Braun, the staff officer of the Viking Division, noted in

in his diary:

"At about 13:00, the command post is temporarily transferred to Tata. Constantly attacked by enemy bombers. No manifestations of their own aviation are visible. The next offensive is difficult. It goes in a mountainous area covered with forest. Tanks can only fight on the roads, which are literally clogged with Russian anti-tank guns. Sometimes their number reaches twenty pieces. Such blockages can only be cleared by massive attacks by our motorized infantry. In the mountains cut by gorges, the use of artillery is not possible. Enemy battalions attack our flanks again and again. The position of a division that went on the offensive very quickly becomes doubtful.

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Kampfgruppe Pape, on the right flank, on the northwestern edge of Alsogalla, ran into heavy anti-tank barriers and extensive minefields. To the west of Tatabánya, a defensive line of Soviet infantry awaited her, who did not intend to retreat. As a result, the Germans had to regroup and advance towards Tarjan. The most surprising thing in this situation was that one and the same battle, in fact, was commanded by two different corps headquarters: [At the SS Panzer Corps (Viking) and the Shtank Corps (Pape battle group)]. This made a certain sense, since the Vikings were supposed to move much further than the Pape battle group, which in many ways served as a cover. The delineation of functions and powers was required for [U of the SS Panzer Corps throughout the entire operation.

During the course of the day, almost all of the tank units pushing their way through the wooded mountains under Soviet fire encountered anti-tank barriers, which almost immediately became notorious. The war diary read:

"Having broken through the enemy defenses, the 5th Viking Panzer Division in Agostiana continued to develop the offensive in the direction of Tarjan. The southern advancing group (a tank regiment and the 2nd panzergrenadier regiment "Germany") ran into anti-tank barriers north of Golna. When an attempt was made to remove the barriers, Soviet infantry attacked the tanks from the west. Bai was taken by the sapper battalion of the 5th Viking Panzer Division. The northern combat group (1st Panzergrenadier Regiment "Germany") at about 9 a.m. after the battle in the forest was able to move towards the exit from the forest thicket south of Tardosh. Tardosh taken. The 5th Panzer Division "Viking" was ordered to advance in two directions from the road to the southeast in order to strike from Tarjan at Bichka. From the Nesmey area, the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" is developing an offensive along the Danube in an easterly direction. After a fierce battle with the Soviet infantry, which was supported by sixteen

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tanks, the path is broken. Contact was established with the bridgeheads of the 96th Infantry Division. The Danube coast in the Nyergeshuifalu region has been released. Having repelled counterattacks from the south and southeast, the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Heads" with the support of individual detachments continues to advance from Nyergeshuifalu in a southerly direction. The division is currently engaged in heavy fighting with enemy tanks and infantry south of Bayot. Ordered to continue the offensive in a southeasterly direction. Reinforced army units continue to advance along the road leading to Tokodu. The latest reports have come in that the enemy, who has settled in a factory 4 kilometers from Nyergeshuifalu, continues to stubbornly resist.

The following orders were issued to continue the offensive:

- 1) The advancing units of the divisional group of the Pope were instructed to gain a foothold in the occupied territories. The rest - to pass through Tata, captured by the "Vikings", head to Taryan to open a passage through the forests and mountainous terrain for the development of an offensive in a western direction from Alsogalla to Tatabánya.
- 2) The SS division "Viking" received an order to go around Tarjan from two sides and, under the cover of night, advance in the direction of Bichke.
- 3) The SS division "Totenkopf" had to develop the offensive in order to eventually gain control over the crossroads near Tokoda. |
- 4) The units of the 711th Infantry Division at the disposal of the Pape divisional group were supposed to comb the territory between Tolna and the Danube (30 kilometers!) Paying special attention to cleaning up the vicinity of Dunaszentmiklós.

The war diary reported: "During the offensive in the northern part of the wooded mountains, the enemy's defense was broken, and by the evening of January 2, positions were reached, passing along

line Alshögalla - Tolna - Bayot, 4 kilometers east of Nyergeshuyfalu. The attack continues."

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Beginning of Operation Konrad.

The advancing German units were constantly subjected to Soviet air raids. It was not until the second day of Operation Konrad that the Luftwaffe stepped in. But the forces of 360 fighters and attack aircraft were clearly not enough to provide the Germans with air supremacy. Meanwhile, on the evening of January 2, 1945, another order came from the headquarters of the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces, addressed to the command of Army Group South. It boiled down to three settings. First, the ultimate goal after the release of Budapest was to create a powerful defensive line between Lake Balaton and the Danube. At the same time, a regrouping of units [At the SS Panzer Corps ("southern version"!)] was envisaged. Secondly, "only as a last resort" the High Command allowed to start preparations for a new offensive operation. This was envisaged in the event that the release of the Hungarian capital fails. Thirdly, in the course of Operation Konrad, the Soviet bridgehead in the Grana region was to be destroyed.

In the evening (about 10 p.m.) of the same day, a conversation took place between Wöhler and Balk. Wöhler expressed the following opinion: "Today the impression is that the attackers are under

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the divisions were very close to error. I ordered the advanced units to expand the front of the offensive in order to continue advancing forward. It can be said that by this moment the "Dead Head" division had advanced too deeply along the Danube bank, and therefore had no way to turn south. At the same time, the division acted in accordance with the received order. The SS division "Viking" did not have enough forces to carry out the notorious "expansion" of the front. The attacking German units should have been glad that they had at least some reserves in the rear that covered their backs. The tank units, no matter how the command wished, were rigidly tied to the few roads that ran through the mountains. The captured territory was already a significant success. To attack in open space or take by storm well-fortified villages and individual estates, a sufficient number of infantry was required - and the Germans did not have it. But still, even late in the evening [U SS Panzer Corps tried to continue the offensive. By midnight, the command of Army Group South received reports of the following:

- The Vikings broke through Tolna and fought at the next anti-tank barriers near Tarjan.

"Dead Head" occupied almost all the surroundings of Bayot and gradually approached Bayne.

— The 96th Infantry Division, following behind the tank units, fought for Tokod. |

- The regimental group of the 96th division, equipped with artillery, entered Komorn, crossed the Danube and followed forward along its bank.

- From the advanced units of the Pape divisional group, which followed the "Vikings", no news was received.

Closer to midnight there was another meeting. This time the conversation took place between Lieutenant General Grolman, Chief of Staff of Army Group South, and Major General Gödke, Chief of Staff of Army Group Balk. The development prospects were mainly discussed

offensive. At the same time, Major General Gedke expressed himself much more critically than Balk:

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the impression that the offensive could fail due to the fault of senior and junior officers. Unlike in 1941-1942, we now do not have well-trained commanders who could make their own decisions. Obviously, this is predetermined by the lack of independent thinking." |

Amazingly, these words were sent to the address of perhaps the most elite units of the Waffen-SS! It is possible that these words were dictated by the fact that there were very tense relations between Gődke and Gille. It is significant that such sentiments prevailed precisely in the Balka army group. Major General Grolman summed up the conversation with the following words: "The mountainous terrain between Tolna and the Danube must be filled with the 711th Infantry Division, which is pulling up to us. The advancing units should not lose their strategic initiative and stop. As long as there is an opportunity, it is necessary to maintain the swiftness of the offensive."

January 3, 1945 (Wednesday). Third day of Operation Konrad

"Temperature - 2" C, clearly. The condition of the roads is unchanged.

A separate combat detachment of the divisional group Pape (20 tanks with armored infantry) in the afternoon, following the "Vikings" to Taryan, turned to the south-west, after which they attacked the industrial zone located east of Tatabanya. Following them, other tank units began to pull up. Soviet soldiers desperately defended themselves in the area of Dunaszentmiklós.

After fierce, prolonged night fighting, units [At the SS Panzer Corps made their way through the Gerech mountains, reaching their eastern spurs:

"During the bloody battles that began at night, Tolna was taken in the early morning hours. The fierce resistance of the enemy to the south and north of the settlement is broken, the offensive continues in the direction of Taryan. The second attack group was able to take Hereg and strikes in a southerly direction. After a fierce battle, Tarjan was taken by concentrated advancing forces.

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Continuing the offensive, by 4:30 p.m., the attacking units were able to advance 5 kilometers southeast of Taryan.

Meanwhile, Generals Balk and Gille demanded to develop the offensive. One of the divisions reported:

"The offensive is moving too slowly. Everything depends on the speed of action... At about 3 pm Tarjan was taken. Many anti-tank guns and prisoners were captured. The local population rejoices... Following the forward units, it was decided to move the division's command post to Taryan.

Units of the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head", first from the north, and then from the west and east, reached Bayne. The enemy launched a counterattack with 26 tanks. In the course of our onslaught, it was repulsed. {11 enemy tanks knocked out, 6 of them with Facetlatphones. The heights located southeast of Bayna favor the defense of the enemy, who has numerous tanks and anti-tank guns. Made a massive attack on the heights. Another combat group of the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" took Nadshap. Moving in a southeasterly direction, 3 kilometers northeast of Bayna, they collided with units of the Shtankov Army Corps, which were moving in the direction of Sarkash. An enemy has settled in Sarkash, whose strength remains unknown. Units of the 96th Infantry Division began to develop an offensive from

Nyergeshui-falu district. They managed to recapture a sugar factory located two kilometers to the east from superior enemy forces. The offensive continues in a northerly direction. There is reconnaissance along the way.

The second of the arrived battalions of the 711th Infantry Division was sent to Somod, in order to launch an offensive from there in a southeasterly direction. At the same time, he is clearing the forest area from disparate enemy units."

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During this day, the commander of Army Group South, General Wöhler, repeatedly visited the command post of the Main Directorate of the Panzer Corps and the 96th Infantry Division. The latter was moved to the town of Buch, located on the northern bank of the Danube. It is possible that the chief of staff, Lieutenant General Grolman, reported to his boss "about the defeatist mood" of Major General Gedke, and therefore the commander of the army group preferred to monitor the situation himself, thereby maintaining order at least in the headquarters. The results of these visits were set out in the combat log:

"TU SS Panzer Corps. I insistently drew the attention of the corps command to the need to continuously move forward, since otherwise the enemy would have a great opportunity to win time to regroup troops. I get the impression that everything possible is being done, and the insignificance of yesterday's successes is not the fault of the soldiers or the corps command. SS-Obergruppenführer Gille was sent to the location of the SS division "Viking".

96th Infantry Division. While the old command post is located in Bucha, the command of the division has been on the south bank of the Danube for two hours...) pulling up forces that are still not on the front line.

As we can see, the command of the group "South" made a bet

to accelerate the pace, General Otto Wöhler, commander of the division, without taking into account Army Group South

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the number of units of the Red Army opposing the Germans and their location. The German war diary reported the following:

"The enemy is beginning to prepare for his own attack, for which he is regrouping troops. In the area of Bichke and a little to the north, where the front line falls on the southern wing of the army group Balka, fresh forces are being brought up, which may be thrown from the vicinity of Se kesfehervar. One can expect some unloading of the rear bridgehead near Budapest. Enemy infantry and tanks offer especially strong resistance in the Bayna area. Here the enemy can inflict significant damage on us in terms of manpower and equipment. Attack groups were ordered to reach the key points of Bichke and Zhambek, as well as a fork in the road near Tokoda. This is necessary in order to prevent the enemy's attempts to create anti-tank barriers and a reinforced line of defense there. Tomorrow, units of the 6th Panzer Division will be transferred from the positions near Gran to help the Balka army group, which will immediately have to join the offensive.

In the evening report of the headquarters of the army group Balka, sent to the headquarters of the army group "South", after describing the hostilities that took place during the day, it was summed up:

"Today's course of the offensive allows us to say that the 5th Viking Panzer Division managed to achieve its goals. At the same time, the enemy has pulled together two battle groups, the first of which is fighting against the 3rd Panzer Division "Totenkopf" south of

Bainy, the second - southwest of Bichke. It can be hoped that in front of the advancing units of the 5th Viking Panzer Division there is currently a space not occupied by the enemy, which will make it possible to cut off Bichka from the rest of the enemy units. P motorized (Soviet. - Auth.) Corps is not yet involved. But, judging by the large number of enemy tanks encountered in battle, it is already on its way. At the same time, both SS Panzer divisions lost too

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a lot of valuable time for us, as we were completely unfamiliar with the highlands. Now, it seems, the time has come when the enemy will withdraw his units from Budapest. So, for example, the 86th Guards Rifle (Soviet. - Auth.) Division, which until now was located near Budapest, was met by us at the Danube, west of the Gran.

Only in the evening did the unloading of trains with the missing units of the SS divisions begin. The loss of time indicated in the report was largely due to the obvious lack of infantry, which would allow the Germans to more or less successfully fight in the forests of the Hungarian mountains. In this situation, it was not so much the tankers that should be blamed, but the German command, which chose too early a date to start the offensive.

Gödke and Balk were forced to beat their chests, desperately proving their own innocence. However, for many, the erroneousness of the decision was already becoming obvious. At 10 pm on the same day, General Wöhler inquired about Bulk's further intentions, to which he received the following reply:

"At about 19:00, the Viking division occupied positions 5 kilometers southwest of Taryan. I dare to hope that at night she will be able to take individual quarters of Bichke. The "Dead Head" division is involved in heavy fighting. The 96th Infantry Division, which today has not succeeded in the offensive, must cover the left flank of the "Totenkopf" southwest of the Gran, where the enemy is pulling up his forces. To the west of Bichke, I plan to use the Pape group, reinforced back in Alshegalle. To advance along the Danube, I also plan to use the 6th Panzer Division, which will move along the right flank of the Viking division. The 711th Infantry Division is still on its way. I am pleased with the results of today. It took tank units only 24 hours to fight in the mountains. The command of the army group is planning to involve a cavalry brigade in the offensive in the Vertesh mountains.

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Such a description of events looks much more optimistic than the image presented by the chief of staff of the army group. But with all this, the fact was ignored that both SS Panzer divisions, like the 96th Infantry Division, only entered the battle in separate units. But it was on this day that 23 echelons arrived by rail only with units of the SS Viking division! But for some reason they were not taken into account by Bulk. |

On the night of January 4, 1945, the PU command of the SS Panzer Corps moved its command post to Tatu (approximately 25 kilometers southeast of Komorn). To develop the offensive, an order was given to take the outskirts of Bichke and Zhambek at night. At the very least, the forward detachments were supposed to start a fight there so that the Soviet troops "did not calm down." At the same time, the 96th Infantry Division was ordered to strike east from the sugar factory at Tokoda, in the direction of Körteles.

January 4, 1945 (Thursday). Fourth day of Operation Konrad

"Temperature from - 4C to - 6 °C. The sky is from clear to changeable. The condition of the roads on the plain is unchanged, in the mountains there is heavy ice, which hinders the advancement of even caterpillar armored personnel carriers. The thickness of the ice near the southern shore of Lake Balaton is 30 cm, near the western shores - 18 cm, which is strong enough for infantry movement.

By order of Marshal Tolbukhin, everything was done to stop the German offensive. At the headquarters of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, they realized the danger that hung over the Soviet units, and therefore countermeasures were urgently taken. What could have been done to stop the tank columns of the SS divisions? In order to stop the Viking division, three rifle divisions, a motorized brigade, a regiment of heavy tanks, four special assault regiments and six engineer battalions were quickly transferred to the Bichke-Zhambek area "in the direction of the main attack". At the same time, the density of Soviet artillery fire on this sector of the front

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was 40 guns and mortars per kilometer. All this did not hide from the command of Army Group South. The war diary read:

"As before, units [of the SS Panzer Corps] moved forward. First of all, this concerns the 5th Viking Panzer Division. However, she was never able to achieve the first intended goal of the offensive - Bichke. On the road leading from Taryan to Bichka, its units in the bulk approached the village of Man, located 4 and a half kilometers northwest of the city of Bichka. At the same time, army units are fighting 5 kilometers west of Bicka. In front of Manyu, the enemy is erecting anti-tank barriers.

The 3rd Panzer Division "Totenkopf" is engaged in fierce battles with the enemy infantry, which has fortified behind anti-tank barriers southeast and east of Bayna. However, during the day, she managed to break through to the northwestern outskirts of Somor, while army battalions covered the left flank of the division near the village of Sharishan. The division... encountered powerful enemy tank groups. |

On the right flank, nothing is known so far about the strength of the enemy, who entrenched himself near Alshegalla. After failing to dislodge it by means of frontal attacks from the north and northwest, today it was decided to attack its positions from the east. Along the Tarjan-Bichke highway, the Pape group, reinforced by tanks, was able to break through to the south, after which they reached a railway crossing 4 kilometers southeast of Felsjogalla. After the railway was blown up in several places, and special blocking posts of the enemy were installed, it is not possible to move forward along it.

On the left flank, during the advance from the sugar factory, units of the 96th Infantry Division ran into the river. As a result, the fork in the road near Tokoda was occupied.

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Units of the 711th Infantry Division continue to clear mountainous terrain in the operational rear of the advancing units. The remnants of the enemy detachments, which had been defending since January 1, were destroyed in the Dunaszentmiklos area. The 6th Panzer Division advances along the Danube towards the 5th Viking Panzer Division.

The enemy is planning his own offensive, which he intends to carry out with forces transferred from the Northern Danube. Aerial reconnaissance reports two powerful enemy motorized columns moving from Gran in a southerly direction. It is possible that the enemy can transfer his forces across the Danube in order to launch a counterattack through the Gran and Pilis mountains, aimed at the left flank of the army group. Or he can turn to the west and start a counter-offensive operation from the bridgehead at the mouth of the Gran near Perkani. There is an opinion that the Soviet command has not yet decided which option to choose.

In this case, German intelligence could not be denied professionalism. The indicated movements of Soviet troops in the area of the Gran, north of the Danube, were only the first actions of the impending offensive towards Comorn. If this operation was successful, all German units located on the southern bank of the Danube risked being surrounded, and therefore had to give up attempts to release the blockade of Budapest.

To continue the offensive, the command of the Army Group "South" gave the army group Balka the following orders:

1) Now the 6th Panzer Division, advancing along the southern bank of the Danube along the mountain roads towards Taryan, was subordinate to Bright's corps group (11th Panzer Corps). She received an order to continue the offensive in the vicinity of Alsheyogalla.

2) The 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" was supposed to continue the offensive to Bichka, but already in southeast on

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Tanks rush through the forest-covered mountains

rule, that is, it was supposed to redirect to Marton-vashar (between Budapest and Lake Velence (Velentsay).

3) The 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" was supposed to take Zhambek, from where it was supposed to strike at the Tarnok-Erd line (approximately 10 kilometers southwest of Budafok) with the aim of occupying the airfield in Budaörs with advanced units, which allowed to establish the supply of Budapest by air.

4) The 96th Infantry Division was to attack Pilisveresvar (about 15 kilometers northwest of Budapest), which would eventually allow reaching the northwestern outskirts of the Hungarian capital.

5) The 711th Infantry Division was to protect the left flank of the 96th Infantry Division while bypassing the Gran from the south. The division was completely transferred to the command of the IV SS Panzer Corps.

6) Panzer Group Pape, together with the 6th Panzer Division, was to attack Felsjogalla, and then move in a southeasterly direction to Kapolnas-Nieka (the northeastern end of Lake Velence).

7) The 4th cavalry brigade was supposed to release the 25th Hungarian infantry stationed near Lake Balaton

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a division and units of Hungarian volunteers, which, together with units of the 1st and 23rd Panzer Divisions, were supposed to strike along the western shore of Lake Velence from positions west of Szekesfehervar.

8) Despite the planned Soviet offensive, the Hungarian division "St. Laszlo" and the 211th Infantry Division were to replace the 3rd and 8th Panzer Divisions near Gran. The 3rd Panzer Division was sent to the operational reserve, and the 8th Panzer Division was to become a reinforcement for the battle group developing the offensive west of Székesfehérvár.

9) The 6th Soviet tank army moving towards the battlefield must be attacked by powerful artillery fire, as well as by all available units of the Luftwaffe.

As you can see, from that moment on, the operation to unblock Budapest moved far to the south. It was easy to recognize the contours of the "southern solution". The difference was that this time the Germans had to attack the Soviet positions in the southern sector with by no means superior forces, as originally planned. At 22 o'clock Balk reported his plan to the commander of Army Group YuGg. He believed that "the enemy paid the price", that is, he suffered great and irreparable losses. "Some sectors of the front are held by the forces of 5-7 battalions." Balk believed that the most favorable moment had come for developing an offensive in a northeasterly direction.

The headquarters of Army Group South agreed with this conclusion. As reinforcements, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was sent from Veszprem to Army Group Balka. Such regroupings not only led to confusion, they interfered with the formation of permanent battle groups. A similar mistake had already been made in December 1944, when the 8th Army fought for the Gran. And if the mixing of divisions this time did not occur (against the will of Bulk) on the largest scale, then this happened only because the command of Army Group South pointed out the need "in the course of regrouping to re-arrange the orders

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tank divisions. However, during those fierce battles on the front line, no one thought about "ordering". Every day cost the German tankers a lot of physical and mental strength. The belated remnants of the divisions have not yet been committed to battle.

January 5, 1945 (Friday). Day 5 of Operation Konrad

"Temperature from - 4 °C to - 6 °C. Foggy. Bad visibility. The condition of the roads and tracks is unchanged. The state of ice on Lake Balaton is unchanged."

Despite the ever-increasing Soviet defense, units of the SS Panzer Corps continued to attempt to advance. Now the advance was paid for by huge sacrifices. On the right flank near Felsjogalla, the Soviet troops launched a major counteroffensive for the first time during the entire operation "Konrad". In the course of it, it was possible to win back a significant territory and plunge into the positions of the Germans to a depth of 3 kilometers. The Germans had to arrange a counterattack themselves.

In the meantime, the 6th Panzer Division was able to wrest from the encirclement just north of the village of Chabdi the reconnaissance detachment of the "Vikings". After this small operation, the German tankers continued their offensive in a southwestern direction. By the evening of January 5, they were able to occupy one of the estates located 3 kilometers northwest of Chabdi:

"The tank regiment of the 5th tank division "Viking" and parts of the panzergrenadier regiment "Germany" set out in a southeast direction from an area located 5 kilometers northwest of the settlement of Man. At 7:10 they reached the road leading from Mani to Bichka. Faced with anti-tank fortifications, they headed south towards Bichka. The bulk of the employees of the panzergrenadier regiment "Germany" covered the flanks of the forward detachment, which was constantly subjected to fierce attacks by the enemy in the area of the settlements of Chabdi and Man. Early in the morning, the 2nd Panzergrenadier Regiment "Westland" succeeded in repulsing the enemy's counterattack at Gyormei.

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At night, Eicke's group from the 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" fought on both sides of the road linking Baina and Somor. Despite the fierce resistance of the enemy, they managed to advance further and even take the northern outskirts of Somor. At the same time, the group encountered here 45 enemy tanks and hurricane fire of anti-tank artillery, and on

heights of the southwestern outskirts - with 18 tanks, which held positions behind anti-tank structures. During a bloody battle in Somor, motorized riflemen of the 2nd Panzergrenadier Regiment and Panzergrenadier Regiment Eicke of the Totenkopf Division managed to break through. Fierce street fighting continues. The tank regiment of the Totenkopf Division managed to break through Somor in a southwestern direction. Now he holds the neighborhood of a fork in the road 2 kilometers southwest of this place. Having occupied the territory near Gyormey, the regiment makes it possible to link together its actions with the actions of the 2nd Westland Panzergrenadier Regiment. The 3rd Panzer Regiment of the Totenkopf Division advanced from the environs of Epel in a northeasterly direction. As a result, he blocked the road to Sharishan, 2.5 kilometers southeast of this place. Attacks by the 3rd Panzer Division "Totenkopf", despite the fire of anti-tank guns and the superior forces of the enemy on the defensive, continue on the heights to the north-west of Dag.

The right-flank attack group of the 96th Infantry Division (283rd Infantry Regiment) launched an offensive from a village located 4 kilometers southeast of Sarkash in the

General Herman Balk, commander of the 6th Army ("Army Group in the Significant South-East on

Balka") board. During the attack

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The dominating height 457 and the territory adjacent to it from the south were taken. The middle and left-flank attacking combat groups launched an offensive in the direction of Kirtelsh from the territory of Tokoda. The offensive was stopped by superior enemy forces on the southwestern and northwestern outskirts of this settlement. The 711th Infantry Division with the arrived units, under cover of darkness, was able to break through from Tokoda in the direction of Chi Dordi in order to advance in a southeasterly direction towards Kestolts and Chev.

As mentioned above, from that day on, the Pape divisional group with the 6th Panzer Division subordinate to it (excluding the Biber battle group, which was given to reinforce the 217th Volksgrenadier Division) obeyed the orders of the command [At the SS Panzer Corps . But at the same time, the corps itself, more or less organized, could fight only on the right flank of the fading offensive. Why the decision on unity of command, which was so necessary during the offensive, was made so late, there are different explanations. Most likely, Balk did not want to leave the threads of the operation in the hands of Gille. Simultaneously with these reshuffles, the "neighbor" in the offensive, Bright's corps group (111th Panzer Corps), was indicated a new offensive line: Koch - Kernier - Verteshboglar - Acha.

During this day, the last echelons with lagging units of the Viking and Dead Head divisions arrived at the station. They were almost immediately sent to the battlefield to the remnants of the already fairly battered divisions that had gone into battle five days ago. By this time, the 96th Infantry Division had gained almost full strength (except for combat losses). The 711th division was to be fully manned any hour. But, contrary to the expectations of the command of Army Group "South", these arriving echelons did not become a tangible addition to the ranks of the divisions. They became only a partial reinforcement, so to speak, replenishment of the combat losses suffered in the previous days of fighting. As a result, the expected quantitative and qualitative impetus for the further development of the offensive did not occur.

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Budapest was no longer supplied even by air. The ring of encirclement was shrinking inexorably. Army Group South faced a number of surprises that day. For example, with seven Junkers-87 bombers, which rained down a hail of bombs on the positions of the 8th (German) Army. Having no time to understand this incident, the command of the army group attributed it to the Romanians, who, together with the equipment once provided to them by the Germans, went over to the side of the Soviet Union in the summer of 1944, and now actively participated in the storming of Budapest.

In the morning, on a special train, Colonel General Guderian arrived at the location of Army Group South, accompanied by the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, Colonel von Bonin. Guderian, who felt that the offensive was developing too slowly, wanted to follow the course of the fighting himself. In his memoirs, he was somewhat "ahead" of events when he wrote: "I was informed about the reasons for the attenuation of the offensive to relieve the blockade of Budapest." The fact is that when the commander of the ground forces arrived at the scene, the offensive, albeit with great difficulty, still continued.

After German intelligence reported on the location of the Soviet units, the army group Balka planned that the 6th Soviet Guards Tank Army would move strictly to the west, without turning around on the southern flank. Nothing has changed in their own German plans. As before, the 3rd Panzer Division had to withdraw to launch an offensive in the area of Szekesfehervár. That is, it was supposed to shift the direction of the main attack to the south. The continuation of the offensive by the forces of the SS division "Viking" was considered impossible. Therefore, the command of the army group Balka ordered only a slight expansion of the wedge in a westerly direction, which was supposed to create a bridge, allowing the flanks to come into contact with the 6th Panzer Division.

Meanwhile, the headquarters [U of the SS Panzer Corps, as well as the commander of the SS division "Viking", planned to turn to the northeast in order to push the Soviet units from the flank of the SS division "Totenkopf" near Somor, and then

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still keep advancing. Such actions had their own logic. At least that way it was easier to achieve the set goals. But at the headquarters of the Balka army group, more attention was paid to the southern direction and the offensive operation planned for January 7 in this direction. It was supposed to strike at the Soviet positions in the vicinity of Mora and just north of Szekesfehervar. At the same time, it should have become clear what forces and what reserves the Red Army had at the disposal of the section between Lake Velence and Budapest. But at the same time, for some reason, it was not taken into account that in the southern direction, Soviet troops could offer much stronger resistance than in the north. For the success of the offensive in the southern direction, the Germans simply did not have the strength.

In the meantime, powerful anti-tank fortifications began to be erected on the left flank of the SS Panzer Corps by the forces of the 711th Infantry Division opposite the Gran on both sides of Gidodi, which were supposed not only to cover the Gran from the southeast, but also to block the advance Soviet tanks in the direction of Pilissentellek and Szentendre.

Colonel-General Guderian agreed with Bulk's description of the situation and plans. In addition, Hitler, who wanted to have daily reports on the situation in Western Hungary, expressed the idea that an additional 20th Panzer Division should be transferred to the southern flank of Army Group Balka. That is, in this way the Fuhrer himself "anticipated" the plan, which Balk more and more actively adhered to. Guderian himself saw the danger that loomed over the 8th Army in places. He wanted to send the 20th Panzer Division to eliminate the threat looming over the 24th Panzer Division. The 8th Panzer Division, which was initially thrown across the Danube, was later withdrawn from the front, finding itself in operational reserve. She was stationed near the Grand, side by side with the Hungarian infantry division "Saint Laszlo".

The Germans must pay tribute to Guderian, who, although he was busy with the affairs of Army Group South all day long, noticed in time the danger of the upcoming general council

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the offensive, which was supposed to start from the Baranovsky bridgehead, located east of Warsaw. After returning from a trip to Hungary on January 9, he tried to convince Hitler that the impending Soviet offensive threatened Germany much more than

actions of the Red Army in Hungary. He requested that reinforcements be placed at the disposal of Army Group Center. But all the efforts of Guderian were in vain. During the discussion, which was conducted in a raised voice, an angry Hitler demanded that Major General Gehlen be sent (after the war he would head the intelligence of the FRG) to a lunatic asylum. Hitler was annoyed by his military forecasts regarding the general situation on the Eastern Front. With all this, Hitler shouted that there were more reserves than ever on the Eastern Front. Guderian calmly objected to this: "The Eastern Front is collapsing like a house of cards. A breakthrough in at least one section of the front is enough, and the process of collapse will become irreversible." But these words did not make any impression on Hitler.

January 6, 1945 (Saturday). The sixth day of Operation Konrad

"Temperature up to -3 °C. Abundant snowfall. Bad visibility. The condition of the roads is unchanged. The ice thickness on Lake Balaton is 15 centimeters from the western shore to a depth of 5 kilometers. Formation of ice accumulations.

January 6 was the date of a radical turning point in Operation Konrad. By this moment, the Soviet troops had fully recovered from the surprise offensive and, having pulled up their reserves, began to throw more and more units into battle. In the direction of the spearhead of the German tank attack, seven infantry divisions and three operational formations rushed. As a result, almost immediately, the SS tankers, located on the right flank of the IV SS Panzer Corps, had to switch from the offensive to a dead-end defense. The German offensive continued only on the left flank near the banks of the Danube. During the offensive, units of the 711th Infantry Division still managed to capture Gran.

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A very difficult operational situation developed. While the Soviet units were actively moving forward near Tolna and Alshögalla, units of the German 6th Panzer Division were able to occupy the heights located 3 kilometers northwest of Bichke. All attempts by the Soviet infantry with the support of tanks to counterattack were unsuccessful.

The 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" also could not boast of significant successes that day. Her units barely had time to repel the Soviet attacks, which were directed at her from all sides. The right-flank attacking divisional group remained in the Chabdi area. It was surrounded by Soviet troops 2.5 kilometers east of Bichke. A forest area was left to the west of the village of Man. The battles in those places were an endless succession of attacks and defenses. The magazine of the divisional group stated: "The division is pulling up all available reserves and goes into a dead-end defense. Worry causes flank cover. We are very dependent on our neighbors."

Some military success was achieved by the SS division "Dead Head". Its units took the heights located 4 kilometers northwest of Zhambek. But the advance stalled at this point - the German tankers did not manage to break through the line of anti-tank barriers, which covered the highway leading from Somor to Zhambek on both sides. Attacks from the Epel-Sharishan position in the direction of Kirva and Dag were repulsed by the Red Army. The overall result of the battles for the day could hardly please anyone. Success was achieved only by units of the 96th Infantry Division, which moved south. They captured the town of Cholnok and the village of Kertelesh from different sides. But the German infantrymen failed to take these settlements - units of the Red Army organized a strong defense in them. The 711th Infantry Division also had some success. After the capture of Zhidodi and the heights adjacent to the village from the northeast, the German infantry was able to reach the outskirts of Gran, thereby blocking almost all exits from the city. To build on the success achieved, the command of the 711th

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division gives the order to transfer all available infantry forces to the southern bank of the Danube in the Zhidodi region in order to take the Gran precisely from the south, while the Soviet troops did not have time to pull up

reinforcement. The battle group of the Hungarian 23rd Infantry Division, which at that time consisted of three infantry battalions, was transferred to the command of the IV SS Panzer Corps. At the headquarters of the tank corps, the opinion prevailed that only a powerful blow on the left (northern), more mobile and mobile flank could achieve a turning point in the course of the stalled offensive.

In the meantime, on the second day of his visit: in Hungary, Colonel-General Guderian visited the command posts [At the SS Panzer Corps and the Army Group Balka. There he was informed current situation:

"In the course of our own 6-day offensive, the enemy defenses in the region of the Vertesh and Gerech mountains are getting stronger day by day. Using infantry and anti-tank fortifications, the enemy holds the front along the line Alsheyogalla - Felsjogalla - Baroque - Chabdi - Bichke - Man - Zham

SS armored corps advancing through the Pilis Mountains

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bek - Kirva - Cholnok - Kertelesh. On this line, the enemy is constantly undertaking counterattacks, issuing orders to his own units so that they break through into our positions during fierce battles. Today, the tank group of the 5th Viking Panzer Division, which had managed to advance between the enemy fortified points at Bicka and Mani the day before, had to unsuccessfully repel enemy attacks from all sides.

In fact, the offensive is successfully developing only on the left flank (96th and 711th infantry divisions). There the advancing units are approaching Cholnok and Kerteleshch. The 711th Infantry Division managed to break through the enemy defense line and reach the city of Gran. This success must be used to strengthen the defenses of our own northern flank in the Grana region. Reconnaissance groups are sent to capture the heights dominating the city from the east. From there, elements of the 711th Infantry Division should turn southeast to outflank the enemy line of defense at Kartelesh. In order to facilitate a poorly developed offensive, an operation must be undertaken elsewhere on the front. The command of Army Group South planned for tomorrow the offensive of the 4th Cavalry Division and Panzer Group on the southern flank of Army Group Balka. An offensive by tank subunits is also being prepared, including units of the 1st MI Panzer Corps and the 3rd Panzer Division in the amount of more than a hundred vehicles, in the sector northeast of Szekesfehervar. The attacking units with a powerful breakthrough in the northeast direction to Chakvar should break through the enemy positions in the southern part of the Vertesh mountains and reach the Vali-Alchut line, which is the first operational task of the offensive.

Despite the optimistic statements of the command of Army Group South, the position of the German units on the northern bank of the Danube was deteriorating hour by hour. Soviet sources described the events of that day as follows:

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"On January 6, the 6th Guards Tank and 7th Guards Armies, without artillery preparation, jointly broke through the German positions at Khron and attacked Komarno in a brilliant night offensive. The advance of the Soviet troops, which continued on January 7, threatened to reach the flanks and even to the rear of the German advanced units. In order to hold back the offensive of the units of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, the German command transferred to this section of the front those units that were supposed to be used to reinforce the divisions rushing to Budapest. Parts of the 3rd Ukrainian Front on January 6 were able to repel the blow of the fascist troops aimed at Budapest. However, it is not possible to develop a counteroffensive due to a lack of forces and troops.

Indeed, on January 6, units of the 2nd Ukrainian Front were able to break through the German defense line in a sector 15 kilometers wide. Moving along the left bank of the Danube, they surrounded

German units. The combat journal of Army Group South reported on this occasion: "North of the Danube, the enemy 6th Guards Army launched a night attack on Komorn, advancing 16 kilometers into our positions in a few hours. It is not possible to repel the enemy's advance. It is assumed that on January 7, 1945, the enemy will continue his attempts to advance."

From the left flank of the army group Balka, from the MI (57th) tank corps, it was reported that the Soviet units struck primarily at the positions of the Hungarian division "Saint Laszlo". The time of the beginning of the offensive was indicated - 2 hours 30 minutes (in Soviet sources it was "3 hours"). By morning, the forward detachments of the Red Army had actually swept away the Hungarians. To stop the advance of Soviet tanks, German operational reserves were put into action: the 8th Panzer and 211th People's Grenadier Divisions. A fierce battle ensued, during which both the Hungarians and the Soviet units were surrounded. However, the blockaded Soviet units, unlike the Hungarians, did not lose self-control, which was noted even by the Germans. Despite desperate attempts, the tank corps failed not only

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recapture the occupied territories from the Red Army, but even stop the Soviet offensive. The tank units of the Red Army were rapidly approaching Komorn. The command of the army group Balka immediately tried to "find the culprits". Major General Gődke reported to the headquarters of Army Group South around midnight:

"One gets the impression that the command of the 8th Panzer Division did not cope with its tasks today, and therefore I am asking for his resignation. As a result of the development of the current situation, reinforcements are required, which should be sent to the bridgehead near Komorn. The commander of the army group asks to send the 208th tank battalion there (which was subordinated to the command of the 1st tank corps. - Auth.). In Komorne, all available units are ready to take up defense.

Lieutenant General Grolman, Chief of Staff of Army Group South, almost immediately reacted to this message: the defense of Komorn, as well as the command of the 8th Panzer Division, was immediately entrusted to Major General Rodin. Such a quick change of command of the division, without a doubt, occurred because Colonel General Guderian was "at the facility". He and the chief of staff of the command of the ground forces, Colonel Bonin, were promptly informed of the unfavorable (for the Germans) developments on the northern bank of the Danube. They were told about it by phone. At the time of the conversation, Guderian and Bonin were at the command post [Near the SS Panzer Corps. At 10 o'clock in the morning, Colonel Bonin was already calling "home", V Zossen, and reported: "Colonel General Guderian decided that the 20th Panzer Division should not be sent to Altsol, as originally planned, but under Neuhausel, where she should join the UP (57th) tank corps.

With the arrival of the 20th Panzer Division, the German counterattack was to begin. It is clear that under the circumstances, all of Guderian's attention was focused on the northern bank of the Danube, and therefore the proposal of General Gille -

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to organize a breakthrough of the blockade of Budapest with all available forces on the left flank [At the SS Panzer Corps — remained virtually unnoticed.

At the headquarters of Army Group South, they primarily discussed the advance of Soviet troops along the northern bank of the Danube and the upcoming defense of Komorn. At the same time, the German command did not yet know that only a part of the 6th Soviet Guards Tank Army was put into action.

At an evening operational meeting held at the headquarters of Army Group South, Colonel von Bonin informed the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, General Wenck, by telephone about the situation that had developed in the Army Group, in particular, in the Army Group

Beam. At the same time, the actions [At the SS Panzer Corps. Von Bonin reported: "It seems that the IV SS Panzer Corps is completely confused. To be frank, such suspicions began to creep in even during the meeting with SS-Obergruppenführer Gille at the command post." According to him (Bonina. - Auth.) opinion, the 6th Panzer Division should withdraw from its current front positions in order to be directed to reinforce the southern flank of the army group Balka, where the offensive was planned.

Such statements ran counter to the opinion of the headquarters of the SS tank corps. They believed that the success of the operation depended on the strengthening of the left (northern) flank. It was necessary to advance south of the Gran and complete the transition through the Pilis mountains. But it is obvious that Gille could not convince Guderian nor von Bonin. |

The chiefs of staff (Army Group South and Army Group Balka) considered the use of the 6th Panzer Division, not intending at first to develop a unified plan. Lieutenant General Grolman wanted to use the 6th Panzer Division on the right flank of the army group. Major General Gaedke considered this risky: "The 6th Panzer Division, even now, could contribute to the expansion of the front of the offensive. The transfer to the right flank would mean a very long trip for the tanks. For some time they would not have been used either on the right or on the left flanks.

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The possibility of dividing the division was considered, when only motorized units, reconnaissance and artillery units would be sent "to the south". Gödcke wanted to wait until January 7th, the day when the German offensive north of Székesfehérvár was to begin. He was interested in how it would generally affect the position of the right flank of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Division (Viking Division). In the war diary of Army Group South, there is a very revealing entry: "The commander of the army group, Balk, suggested that in the event that the besieged garrison of Budapest was in a critical situation, the 6th Panzer Division would rush to the city from Gran through the Pilis Mountains.

It is noteworthy that this partly corresponded to the ideas expressed by Gille. But to understand the essence of this "anti-crisis plan", one must read it more than once. The commander of the army group, who had at his disposal the IV SS Panzer Corps just in order (and only in order) to relieve the blockade of Budapest, was going to carry out the task assigned to him only as a last resort. Apparently, he believed that the situation of the German-Hungarian group surrounded by Soviet troops in Budapest was not yet the most critical. However, he could not help but know that every day the forces of the encircled Germans and Hungarians were melting like snow in spring, and air supply was actually not carried out. In a situation like this, every hour counted. It was absolutely absurd to wait for some kind of miracle that supposedly should happen in Budapest.

Thus, the eventful day of January 6, 1945 ended in nothing. At the headquarters of the IV SS Panzer Corps, they could only watch with disappointment as the arriving reinforcements disappeared in a southerly direction - where they would have to face fresh Soviet units with good reserves. In view of the successes of the 711th Infantry Division near Gran, the implementation of the "southern solution" seemed completely incomprehensible. In conditions when Waffen-SS General Gille, in contrast to Balk as the commander of an army group, did not have full information

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tion, he still had a deeper tactical instinct when he proposed to strike at the encirclement ring through the Pilis mountains. But following the events of January 6, the following plan was adopted: "A strike from the area lying northwest of Szekesfehervar, with the forces of the 1st Cavalry Corps (commander - General of the Cavalry Hartenek), the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions, with the support of the 4th th cavalry brigade to strike at the Soviet troops near Chakvar,

encircle them, cutting off from the positions of the GU Panzer Corps in the Vertesh Mountains, and thereby give the SS Panzer units the opportunity to break through to Budapest.

January 7, 1945 (Sunday). Day 7 of Operation Konrad

"Temperature - 2" C. Strong cloud cover. Snowfall. Bad visibility. Road traffic is deteriorating. Roads in the mountains are heavily snow-covered in places and difficult to pass for armored transporters."

In the morning, on the right flank of the Balka army group, a diversionary offensive began, on which the German army command placed great hopes. Its beginning was described in the combat log of Army Group South:

"Bright's corps group attacked with the forces of the 1st Cavalry Corps, the 23rd Panzer Division, the 4th Cavalry Brigade and the 3rd Panzer Division. On the battlefield, the group faced strong enemy defenses. The 23rd Panzer Division took the villages of Sharkerestesh and Borbala. The 4th Cavalry Brigade took a hill 3 kilometers southeast of Zamoy. Veiman's group, supported by tanks, reached the estate, located 2 kilometers west of Zamoy. The 3rd Panzer Division took Sheered on the move and Chakbereni is moving in a northeasterly direction, overcoming enemy counterattacks, advancing | | kilometer south of Chakberen. The forces of the 1st cavalry corps destroyed and captured 30 enemy tanks, 45 anti-tank guns, 14 field guns, 5 German anti-aircraft guns of 88 mm caliber ... Obviously, the enemy calculated

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he warned that the offensive would be directed towards Budapest, and not the Vertesh mountains. He was ready for defense and created a defensive line along the Sharquerestesh-Borbala-Zamoy-Chakberen line. Here there is fierce resistance, which can result in a bloody battle on the right flank of the attacking units. It is still not clear whether the enemy has armored units at his disposal that can be put into action, Lieutenant-Herman Breit, commander of the powers of his counteroffensive. 1st tank corps

To attack north of Szekesfehervar, not expecting a front of resistance from the Soviet troops in this sector, was at least naive, since Marshal Tolbukhin was already ready for such deceptive maneuvers. German troops staged such maneuvers exactly on the same sector of the front a week ago - December 31, 1944, thus providing cover for the start of Operation Konrad. However, this somehow weakened the Soviet onslaught on the right flank of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps. But even in this situation, the Vikings, although they fought off the Soviet counterattacks, could not attack themselves. Only the left wing of the SS corps managed to continue the offensive:

"The SS Panzer Corps: managed to repulse enemy sorties from Felyiyogalla. The 6th Panzer Division took a height 3 kilometers northwest of Bichke and was able to repel enemy counterattacks supported by tanks on it. The 5th Viking Panzer Division, after breaking through the enemy defenses and fierce street fighting, took Chabdi. Here, enemy counterattacks from the settlements of Bichke and Man were repulsed. The forest to the west of the village of Man, which passed into the hands of the enemy during the enemy counterattack, has been cleared again. Height 317

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after strong enemy counterattacks from Zhambek, it was kept in our hands. The 3rd Panzer Division "Dead Head" was able to advance east of Zhambek with the forces of the Panzergrenadier Regiment Eicke. The division was able to repel a powerful enemy counterattack from Sharishan, and in the afternoon advanced 5 kilometers to the south. The 96th Infantry Division surrounded Cholnok during a mass offensive. The 711th Infantry Division took a height 2.5 kilometers southeast of Zhidodi. She holds the territory while developing an offensive to the southeast from the Grana area. Northern advancing group (meaning IV SS Panzer Corps.

- Auth.) Reflects powerful enemy counterattacks from Bichke and Mani. Own offensive is only partially possible. At the same time, the 711th Infantry Division is successfully advancing."

But at the same time, the Germans should not forget that the Soviet troops very successfully developed the offensive on the northern bank of the Danube. On January 7, 1945, Soviet tanks and motorized infantry were only some 5 kilometers from Komorn. The German counterattack on this sector of the front almost immediately bogged down. By controlling the northern bank of the Danube, Soviet artillery could, in fact, without any problems conduct a massive artillery shelling of the southern bank. As a result, it turned out that the German units could advance along the left-bank Danube roads "with impunity" only under the cover of night. But even here the situation could change overnight. In general, there are not so many cases in military history when units advancing towards each other (Soviet from the north, German from the south) were separated by only a river. As a result, the command of the Army Group "South" asked a fair question: "The enemy offensive along the northern bank of the Danube to the bridgehead at Komorn makes one wonder whether it makes sense to stop the successful offensive on the southern bank of the Danube or continue it with limited forces, transferring part of the subdivision on the northern coast, where they should become reinforcements for the 20th Panzer Division?"

Meanwhile, more and more alarming news came from Budapest. As a result, the command of Army Group South

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decides to try to stop the Soviet offensive along the north coast with the available forces of the 20th Panzer Division. This is done in order not to jeopardize the main goal of the German offensive - the release of the Hungarian capital. "Own offensive is an urgent task, since the tactical situation in the eastern bridgehead of Budapest is very tense."

Even in the first half of the day, at about 10 o'clock in the morning, the command of the Balka army group was of the opinion that Budayorsha (the final goal of the operation) could be reached by the forces of [the cavalry corps. This would force the Soviet command to regroup troops west of the Hungarian capital. As soon as the units of the JU Panzer Corps felt the weakening of Soviet pressure, they were to make a decisive throw to the northwestern outskirts of Budapest.

At the headquarters [At the SS Panzer Corps, they have already begun to prepare to transfer the main forces of the Panzer divisions to their left flank, while exposing the right flank of the corps. The positions on the right flank were to be held by small forces of a few units. In order to stop the Soviet attack on Komorn, the command of the army group Balka conceived a kind of "tactical cycle". The German units were supposed to attack the Soviet troops across the Danube on the Gran-Comorn segment. At the same time, the 6th Panzer Army was supposed to turn the point of attack on the Danube itself, opening the flank for the strike of the German 20th Panzer Division. But at the same time, the command of the Army Group "South" again began to consider the possibility of "withdrawing" the 6th Panzer Division from the right flank [At the SS Panzer Corps and transferring it to the aid of the 1st Cavalry Corps. In such conditions, the headquarters of the army group Balka hesitated: "The impression was that again the northern group could succeed in the offensive. It is expected that tomorrow or the day after tomorrow a direct connection with Budapest will be established. But, taking into account the activity of enemy attacks and our lack of forces, in Budapest we will have to surrender at least part of the eastern bridgehead.

Such tactical optimism was generally very characteristic of General Bulk. However, this hopeful car

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the mud was overshadowed by the opinion of the chief of staff of Army Group South. He did not believe that the 96th and 711th divisions would be able to achieve at least some noticeable success in the Pilis mountains: "According to

According to reconnaissance data, the enemy transferred three divisions to the Pilis mountains from the northern bank of the Danube. An attempt to break through the mountains to Budapest by the forces of tank units has no chance of success. It all depends on who controls the heights east of the Gran.

In an evening report from Army Group South, the German High Command of the German Ground Forces reported that it was adhering to the previous goals of the offensive, despite the fact that the 1st Cavalry Corps moved slowly into position, and the 20th Panzer Division slowed down its advance due to an hour mine explosions. That same evening, General Balk reported to the commander of Army Group South, General Wehler:

"The offensive [of the cavalry corps was able to break through the enemy defenses on a front section 6 kilometers wide. At the same time, the corps went deep into positions against

Often tanks had to wade through the forests

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Nika for 6 kilometers. As a result of this operation, the forces of the (Soviet. - Auth.) Guards Motorized Corps, consisting of 50 tanks, launched a counterattack. Until that moment, 30 tanks, 40 anti-tank guns, 14 field guns were destroyed or captured. The advanced parts of the corps destroyed 20 tanks. After that, the enemy attacked from all sides at once. Persistent resistance was explained by the fact that, according to the captured Red Army soldier, the military group was trying to disguise the operation carried out to the north. At the same time, units of the 7th 11th Infantry Division were attacked by superior enemy forces southeast of Pilisszentelek. The enemy was to attack the battle group from the mountains and move west to sweep away this important tactical stronghold. He intends to move the epicenter of the fighting further north to strike at us in the mountains."

The German command, even by midnight, failed to collect information from the fighting divisions. Work on the formation of a single picture of the battle had to be continued late at night. Without this information, it was very difficult to plan further actions. The operational department was actively working in the command of the ground forces. They believed: "The continuation of the offensive [of the cavalry corps makes sense only if it can facilitate the actions of the northern advancing group. But this is not to be expected."

In the High Command of the German Ground Forces, the "comorne threat" was so seriously assessed that they even considered the possibility of withdrawing the entire Bright corps group to the northern bank of the Danube. Army Group South, on the other hand, thought they could hold Comorn. "When troops are transferred to the northern bank of the Danube, a military catastrophe may occur on the southern bank. This step may have the most unforeseen consequences."

The commander of Army Group South urged Colonel General Guderian to give the 1st Cavalry Corps "at least one more chance" before it was withdrawn to the north. To realize this chance, General

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Wöhler was even ready to order the left wing [At the tank corps to gain a foothold in the Gran area. Guderian heeded these requests. He agreed, but at the same time pointed out: "Should not an offensive operation be undertaken at the same time from inside Budapest, so that both sides move towards each other?" .

When Wöhler objected that he had Hitler's order not to leave the eastern foothold in Budapest under any circumstances, Guderian promised "tomorrow" to settle the matter personally with the Führer. But in those conditions it was extremely difficult, in fact impossible, to fight for Budapest and at the same time carry out a breakthrough from the Hungarian capital in a northwestern direction. On

in fact, the German-Hungarian group, besieged in Budapest, could hardly cope with only one of these tasks.

It is possible that it was Hitler who was to blame for this situation, who wanted to keep all control in his hands. But it cannot be ruled out that Hitler, the General Staff of the Ground Forces and Guderian did not have sufficient information to make the correct tactical decision. It is indicative that the more critical the situation in Western Hungary became, the more difficult it was to contact Berlin. Often the command of the army group did not know which of the orders to carry out.

Here the question naturally arises: why was Gille's proposal ignored in order to strike in the direction of Budapest through the Pilis Mountains with all available forces concentrated on both sides of the Gran? There are several explanations for this. First, the information coming from Budapest to Berlin is equally

During the offensive through the And snow-capped mountains, tankers rarely had a moment to rest "South" as well as at the headquarters of the army group, they could count too much

panic. Secondly, the German-Hungarian group encircled in Budapest was to become a sacrifice made in order to tie down the offensive of the Soviet troops in the direction of Bratislava and Vienna for several weeks.

When the commandant of Budapest once again informed the headquarters of the Balka army group about the catastrophic situation, Major General Gedke said that he himself expected better results "from today's offensive, undertaken by the forces of 137 armored vehicles from the corps group Bright." As a reassurance, it was said that "Balk is rushing about with the thought of a breakthrough with the help of motorized infantry battalions of the Feldherrnhalle panzergrenadier division (not to be confused with the Panzer division of the same name, blockaded in Budapest. - Auth.), which are just arriving in Gran". At the same time, the release of the "fortress" of Budapest was supposed to be carried out in several stages:

- 1) Transfer of the line of defense in Budapest from the Eastern to the Western bridgehead (leaving Pest and moving to Buda).
- 2) Organization of a breakthrough from the territory of the western bridgehead (Buda) in the direction of the Pilis Mountains.
- 3) In case of failure of this venture, the encircled units were to leave through the mountains in small battle groups.

We emphasize that this decision was made on the night of January 8. This suggested that in a day, that is, on the night of January 8-9, the German and Hungarian troops were to leave the territory of Pest (eastern bridgehead). A breakthrough from inside the Hungarian capital was to begin in the early morning of January 9th. Everyone was anxiously awaiting the approval of this plan by Hitler. In order not to lose time in vain, the German High Command of the Land Forces developed a plan for a "big decision", which took into account not only the situation in Budapest, but also the situation near Komorn. In the event that [the cavalry corps could not take advantage of the "chance given to it", the Balka army group was to carry out the following plan:

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- "1) The IV SS Panzer Corps must move the main forces to the left flank in order to push the Soviet units out of the Pilis Mountains.
- 2) X SS Mountain Corps should break through from Budapest in a northwesterly direction.

3) All available free forces must be thrown into a counterattack on the left bank of the Danube. It was not ruled out that Bright's entire corps group, which at that time numbered about 100 tanks, could be used for this.

4) The retreating units of the Red Army should be attacked near the western spurs of the Pilish Mountains by the forces of the 4th Cavalry Brigade. At the same time, the forces of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade attacked from the south.

The details of the operation should have been clarified by noon on January 8, when the data of German intelligence would become known, and all information from the fighting German divisions would be collected.

January 8, 1945 (Monday). Day 8 of Operation Konrad

"Light cold. It snows in places. Strong cloud cover. Compared to the previous day, the condition of the roads is unchanged".

During the night offensive, the leading elements of the [cavalry corps] were only able to advance slightly on either side of Zamoy. Meanwhile, Soviet troops were building new defensive fortifications and putting new units into action. The 4th Soviet Army was withdrawn to the reserve, and the 7th Mechanized Corps entered the battle near Zamoy.

Despite optimistic expectations, the onslaught of Soviet troops on the right flank of the IV SS Panzer Corps did not weaken at all. Prospects for the development of the offensive became minimal:

"Near the SS Panzer Corps, incorporating the 6th Panzer Division, fought fierce battles on the heights to the north and west of Bichka against superior enemy forces. Managed

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repulse the enemy counterattacks, supported by tanks, made from Bicka. Also, the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" and the 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" repelled numerous enemy tank counterattacks from the territory of the settlements of Man and Zhambek. The left flank units of the 711th Infantry Division had occupied Piliszentlök the previous night. After that, they established that Kestoltz was occupied by the enemy. During the subsequent attack directed to the southeast, the right flank group of the infantry division managed to occupy the heights located immediately north and northwest of Kestöölz, and the left flank group of the same division managed to reach 2 kilometers south of -East of Pilishsentlelek. In the afternoon, a powerful counterattack was launched from Kestolets by the enemy infantry, during which the right-flank group was driven back to their original positions. The enemy succeeded in blocking the road to the east of Gidodi, linking Gran and Pilissentlelek. Two of the units of the 96th Infantry Division located in Grana were able to release the positions of the battalion of the 711th Infantry Division, thereby clearing the way. On the southern bank of the Danube, the enemy is bringing up additional forces from the east. They took up defensive positions 4 kilometers east of Gran.

The activity of the left flank [At the SS Panzer Corps and the 711th Infantry Division forced the Soviet command to transfer part of the Soviet troops from the western bridgehead in Budapest (Buda). So on this day, the activity of attacks on the besieged German-Hungarian group in Buda decreased markedly.

But the activity of hostilities

Viy on the northern bank of the Danube is not, Gustav Hartenak, the commander was down. Soviet tanks non- 1 cavalry corps

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intermittently attacked the German positions, trying to break through to Comorn and Neuhausel. Both sides suffered huge losses. Along the entire front, the Soviet units tried to push the Germans to the west. It was on this day that the battle reached its climax. The Soviet command, in order to quickly decide the outcome of the battle, sent fresh units into battle: the 9th Guards Mechanized Corps was aimed at Neuhausel, and the 5th Guards Tank Corps at Komorn.

In the command of Army Group South, justified fears began to arise regarding the reality of the release of Budapest if the grouping located in it would be supplied as badly as before, and the pace of the offensive of the army group Balka would be the same. low. It was possible to break through to the Hungarian capital only in the course of a swift and powerful offensive. Army Group South's war diary on that day stated:

"It seems doubtful that success can be achieved in the current situation. On the other hand, the bridgehead at Comorn and Neuhausel was in a critical situation. For this reason, the command of the army group is faced with the need to decide whether it should first concentrate on operations on the north bank of the Danube in order to defeat the enemy advancing in the direction of Comorn and Neuhausel in the first place. The adoption of such a decision actually means the rejection of the release of Budapest. Consequently, Army Group Headquarters assumes that the beleaguered garrison will have to fight their way out of Budapest on their own. A breakthrough from Budapest in a northwesterly direction can be supported by the northern wing of the advanced units of the IV SS Panzer Corps, which, after fierce attacks, were able to take control of the Pilis Mountains southeast of Pilissentelek.

The immediate tactical goal of the offensive, still carried out by the SS corps, in this area was the settlement of Pomaz, more precisely, the airfield located next to it. If this combat mission would

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If the plan was fulfilled, then the northern outskirts of Budapest would be literally a few kilometers from the advanced units of the SS. In this situation, it was possible to make a breakthrough from the city. It was only necessary to agree on the details and carry out the necessary preparations. But Hitler intervened. He was adamant - in Budapest it was necessary to fight for every house. There was no question of a breakthrough and exit of the encircled German-Hungarian grouping from the Soviet ring. Budapest was to be recaptured by the German troops, not abandoned by them. Such intransigence of the Fuhrer put an end to the planned operation. In these circumstances, the command of the Army Group "South" could only launch a counterattack on the northern bank of the Danube in order to push the Soviet troops back from the bridgehead in Comorne with the forces of the 20th Panzer Division. The grandiose German counter-offensive, which was supposed to return the Gran and restore the front within the borders of late 1944, was postponed indefinitely - at least until the troops located on the southern flank of the army group Balka were transferred to the north. But even under these conditions, the offensive [of the cavalry corps had to continue. It could not lead to any significant tactical success, but for a time it pinned down considerable Soviet tank units on both sides of Zamoy. This made it possible to hope that they would not be involved in the assault on Budapest.

To rectify the situation, the Germans needed the initiative and freedom of action granted to the generals and senior officers of Army Group South. But this is exactly what Hitler denied them. After January 6, the most obvious and tactically correct decision was the maximum possible strengthening of the left flank of the IV SS Panzer Corps, which would "open" the encirclement around Budapest through the Pilis Mountains. Despite the active offensive on the northern bank of the Danube, the command of Army Group South assessed the approach of the Red Army to Komorn as an operation with secondary goals. Indeed, there was a possibility that the Red Army units would go to the rear of the Balka army group. But at the same time the Germans continued

to control the Gran, which in turn allowed them to resort to highly effective countermeasures.

By noon, at the headquarters of the army group Balka, they agreed to what Gille had demanded for so long: to withdraw the 6th Panzer Division from the vicinity of Felsjogalla, where it was on the defensive on the right flank of the SS Panzer Corps, to be transferred to the left flank, where it was supposed to take an active part in the offensive.

However, the headquarters of the Army Group "South" demanded that the transfer of the 6th Panzer Division to a new sector of the front be carefully prepared. And the very date of this transfer was to be determined precisely by the command of the army group. The army group headquarters also had to decide where the division would be used. There were only two options here: either on the northern flank [near the SS Panzer Corps, where there was the greatest chance of making a breakthrough to Budapest, or on the southern flank of the Balka army grouping together with the 1st Cavalry Corps, where the offensive had no no chance of success. Once again there was a misunderstanding between the commanders. During the conversation between Balk and Wöhler, various issues were discussed, but above all, a new version of the operation to unblock the Hungarian capital. Balk said: | |

"If the offensive [of the cavalry corps is not successful, then it must be remembered that the 23rd Panzer Division or the 4th Cavalry Brigade, together with the newly replenished Hungarian units, if it is impossible to destroy the enemy, will be driven into the Vertesh mountains. In addition, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade of the approaching 2nd Army could approach for this purpose. And the 3rd Panzer Division, together with the cavalry brigade, could be transferred to Komorn, where they would attack the Soviet units together with the 20th Panzer Division."

The actual deblocking of Budapest has faded into the background. As a result, Major General Gedke developed the following action plan for the Army Group Balka:

"The 96th division must break through the barriers northeast of the Gran. After that, the army group with the arrived motorized battalions of the Feldherrnhalle panzergrenadier division, supported by tanks and armored vehicles, should go to the Danube bank in the area of Pomaz and Budakalas, seize all the surrounding spaces and take over the Pomaz airfield, from which to supply Budapest. The 711th Infantry Division must hold back the offensive from the Pilis Mountains. The regimental group of the 5th Viking Panzer Division is placed at its disposal to carry out the operation in mountainous terrain. The garrison blockaded in Budapest must surrender the eastern bridgehead (Pest) and focus primarily on the defense of the Budaörs airfield. This should make it possible to win three days of time to take out all the wounded and start supplying. You can mislead the enemy with false maneuvers.

The chief of staff of Army Group South did not quite agree with the proposed plan. He objected: "Success in the north largely depends on the success of the operation on the southern flank, especially on the southern flank [At the SS Panzer Corps." Nevertheless, at the headquarters of the tank corps, they still considered the possibility of a complete transfer of the Viking SS division, and the most weakened part of the formation was left for defense. In spite of everything, Gille was ready to take the risk, because he believed that breaking through the Pilish Mountains was the only chance. He wrote:

"1) Bright's corps group must continue to counter-attack so that the enemy can transfer significant forces from other sectors of the front. Otherwise, these enemy troops can be thrown to storm Budapest or against [At the SS Panzer Corps.

2) Apply for an eastern bridgehead in Budapest and prepare for a breakthrough in a northwesterly direction from the western Budapest bridgehead in order to reach the Pomaz airfield and the village of Chobanka, which will allow

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lit to continue the battle for Budapest after the removal of the wounded by air bridge over the mountains.

3) Start tomorrow an auxiliary operation with reinforced motorized battalions of the Feldherrnhalle Panzergrenadier Division and tanks on the banks of the Danube east of the Gran. Strike from the Gran in the direction of Szentendre.

4) In the event that all military units do not arrive tomorrow on the northern bank of the Danube, the forces of the 20th Panzer Division will attack in the direction of Neuhausel with the simultaneous launch of an attack from the Komorn region ...; The People's Artillery Corps is to arrive south of the Danube in the Grana region to fire on the enemy supply line at Nana and Musla. There is no exact information about the enemy advancing on Comorn. However, there is certainty that the [U (Soviet) Guards Mechanized Corps is advancing to the west of the Gran.

5) Undertake a simultaneous offensive towards the Verteš mountains by the forces of the Hungarian hussars and German units, from where the enemy should, if possible, be squeezed out to the east; when the 2nd Panzer Army arrives at the starting positions; later, the 3rd cavalry brigade should be transferred here.

The headquarters of Army Group South warned against starting too early an "auxiliary operation" on the banks of the Danube:

"The enemy has become attentive, which can further complicate the situation in Budapest. Therefore, it would be more logical to start this operation at the same time as the breakthrough from Budapest ... The X SS Mountain Corps will be ready for this at best by January 10th. We must also take into account that it will take at least a couple of days for him to make the breakthrough itself.

In this situation, those who were supposed to advance along the southern bank of the Danube under heavy artillery fire from the northern, "Russian" bank, were, in fact, suicide bombers. In this case, the optimism of General Bulk is not entirely clear. Gille considered this "walk" along the banks of the Danube to be completely unfeasible. When he started talking to Balk about it,

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having offered to use "penalty boxes" for an offensive in the mountains, the general abandoned this idea. However, after the war, he admitted his mistake.

The first act of the offensive was the regrouping of the main SS Panzer Corps and the direction of the significantly reinforced Westland motorized regiment south of the Gran. This battle group was supposed to reach its original positions by the evening of January 9th. And this is only on condition that the transfer would go flawlessly.

In the meantime, the headquarters of Army Group South notified the High Command of the Ground Forces of their plans. This happened in two ways. First of all, the Chief of Staff of the Army Group South reported this to the Chief of the Operations Department of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, Colonel von Bonin. It happened around 18:00. An hour later, General Wöhler had a conversation with Colonel General Guderian. Wöhler tried to insist that the problems of the eastern bridgehead should be solved "at the local level", that is, in Budapest itself. Guderian formally agreed with this, but nevertheless made the reservation that he was going to the Fuhrer at night in order to "resolve the Budapest question." Guderian himself had no illusions about the outcome of this conversation with Hitler: "It is highly doubtful that he will give his consent to this. His position is primarily dictated by political views."

In connection with this conversation, the command of Army Group South demanded that Balk convey to the commandant of the besieged Budapest, Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, a categorical order: "The X Mountain Corps must hold the eastern bridgehead of Budapest until a decision is made by the Fuhrer. According to the decision of the Fuhrer, in matters of defense of the eastern bridgehead, one can disregard the opinion of Colonel General Guderian.

As a result, the idea of shifting the epicenter of the battle to the left flank of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps, in order to ultimately try to unlock Budapest with a powerful breakthrough through the Pilis Mountains, was a confirmation that the original idea of Operation Konrad had failed completely. Operation "Konrad", which went down in history under the name "Konrad I", for

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ended. German troops could not even come close to Budapest, not to mention the lifting of the blockade from it. But no one canceled Hitler's order to unblock the Hungarian capital. Preparations for Operation Konrad 1) have begun.

Chapter 4 OPERATION KONRAD II

The military-historical literature, including domestic literature, speaks of three attempts by the German troops to release the blockade of Budapest. At first glance, it may seem that the combat actions designated as "Konrad 11" are just a continuation of "Konrad", and the main difference between these operations is that it was first planned to strike at the Soviet positions through the Vertesh mountains and then through Pilisskie. But this superficial judgment is not entirely correct. "Konrad P" was by no means a logical continuation of "Konrad". The regrouping carried out on the left flank [near the SS Panzer Corps] actually meant a new combat readiness. This operation has its own special significance, if only because Hitler later ordered the command of Army Group South to implement the "southern solution", which was called Operation Konrad 111.

Even Soviet historiography, which traditionally refers to the events of the first half of January 1945 as the "Battle of Bichke", distinguishes between the first two operations. During this battle, the Soviet troops managed to finally stop the advance of the right wing [At the SS tank corps. This was done only after the 18th Soviet tank corps was thrown into battle.

The German counter-offensive on the northern bank of the Danube did not bring the expected weakening of the pressure of the troops of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, commanded by Marshal R. Malinovsky. The Soviet advance north of the Danube was stopped for a while only after the command of the army group Balka decided to use the 20th Panzer

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divisions. In response to this, the Soviet command launched two infantry divisions and a tank brigade into action, but the offensive had already stalled. For some time, on the northern bank of the Danube, none of the forces could turn the tide and gain the upper hand.

"Many Soviet units were attached to Budapest, primarily artillery units. But at the same time, a new grueling battle broke out around Zamoy. It is worth emphasizing that the Headquarters and Stalin were personally very dissatisfied with the course of the Battle of Budapest - the capture of the Hungarian capital dragged on for many weeks. Obviously, after the failure of Operation Konrad, no one in the Soviet command believed that the Germans were still capable of undertaking a more or less effective counter-operation. More and more often, in Soviet reports, voices began to be heard about the imminent fall of Budapest, about the failure of German attempts to unlock it. But these reports did not correspond to reality at all. Soviet propaganda portrayed the battle for Budapest as "the hardest after Stalingrad". In order to strengthen this image, the losses of the Germans and Hungarians were deliberately exaggerated. Paradoxically, until recently, almost all researchers operated with these far-fetched and inflated figures.

During the offensive operation "Konrad" was clearly affected by the lack of assault guns

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January 9, 1945 (Tuesday). First day of Operation Konrad III

"The temperature is about 0 °C. Strong cloud cover. Foggy. There is a heavy snowfall at the location of the 8th Army. Roads in the mountains are difficult to pass.

The forces of [the German cavalry corps were drawn into a major battle at Zamoy, trying to resist the outnumbered Soviet tank units. The Soviet command wanted to break the advanced units at all costs and push the advancing Germans back. For this, for the first time, [the Guards Tank Corps, which until that moment was located near Budapest, was used. Oddly enough, the Germans managed to repel all Soviet counterattacks. Soviet troops, without advancing a kilometer to the west, lost 74 tanks. As a result, the 1st Cavalry Corps coped with the tactical task assigned to it. He not only pulled part of the Soviet troops away from Budapest, but was also able to inflict significant damage on them. Moreover, he managed to pin down the Soviet troops, which were supposed to be used in the Pilis mountains against the advancing German units.

On the eve of this, on the night of January 8-9, 1945, the 5th SS Panzer Division "handed over" the reinforced regimental group "Westland" to the operational disposal of the 6th Panzer Division. During the movement of the regimental group, it was repeatedly attacked by Soviet troops in the area of the settlements of Bichke, Man and Zhambek. But despite this, the regrouping was successful. In this case, one must take into account the fact that the operation was carried out in bad weather and large snow drifts. From 15 o'clock the regimental group, directly led by the division commander, moved along icy forest roads and field detours through Taryan, Baina, Nagyszap. She was heading to the left flank, to the area lying to the poop of Gran. Upon arrival at the starting positions, the Westland immediately placed itself at the disposal of the command of the 711th Infantry Division in order to launch an attack in the southeast direction on Szentendra. The tactical goal of the operation was

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Anointing. By 24 o'clock the regimental group was ready to carry out the order.

The 96th Infantry Division, which received a reinforcement battalion, occupied positions just east of the Gran on the banks of the Danube. It was a very narrow and very open place. At 22 o'clock "Philip's battle group" was to begin a sortie to the southern bank of the Danube.

As mentioned above, on the northern bank of the Danube, fierce battles did not bring tactical superiority to any of the warring parties. The Germans managed to hold Comorn and Neuhäusel, but at the same time, the Soviet troops managed to create a defensive line, which made all German counterattacks very difficult. For the Germans, the situation was complicated by the fact that the bulk of the 20th Panzer Division could enter the battle only on January 10th. The fact is that its units were not completely delivered by rail from Zilina to Vaagtal. No one dared to repeat the mistake of the beginning of January and to send an incompletely equipped division into battle.

But on the whole, the situation was in many respects favorable for the Germans. The offensive plan was by no means fantastic. The success of the German offensive was quite possible. The situation in Budapest, on the other hand, was hopeless. Air supply has virtually ceased. During the day, about 50 tons of cargo was dumped into the city of a million people (it was dumped, not unloaded). In conditions when there were no significant reserves in Budapest even on the eve of the encirclement, this was a drop in the ocean. At the same time, another "fateful" decision was made in Berlin: the encircled German-Hungarian group was forbidden not only to make a breakthrough from the city, but even to make tactical decisions on its own. Guderian, not without regret, said: "The Fuehrer has planned a new grandiose offensive with the aim of deblocking Budapest. It

should start from the area southeast of Szekesfehervar and just south of Lake Velence. One can only speculate why Hitler made such a decision, which turned out to be fatal for Army Group South. He probably assumed that the original plan "Paula" (southern solution) was more successful.

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nym. Meanwhile, Hitler did not take into account the fact that the situation in Western Hungary had already changed during the fighting. In addition, there were actually no plans to unblock Budapest. The grouping left there to the mercy of fate was supposed to perform only one function - to tie down the actions of units of the 2nd and 3rd Ukrainian fronts for as long as possible. At the same time, the potentially successful operation "Konrad 11" could have ended in disaster, and not so much due to the efforts of the Soviet troops, but due to Hitler's decision. The Fuhrer himself at that time was extremely nervous and impatient, he expected quick success from an equally hastily planned operation in the Ardennes.

Before forwarding the evening's report to the High Command of the Army, General Wehler contacted Balk to inquire about the further actions of the army group south of the Gran. In response, Balk reported: "This night, the advancing units must advance at least as far as Szentendre, in order thereby to pave their way to Budapest. This undertaking must be simultaneously supported by the 711th Infantry Division, which must break through the mountains to Budapest.

In response, Wöhler noted that the start of the operation was somewhat hasty, since at first one would have to wait for a decision from Budapest itself. Balk noticed that the situation in Budapest was so critical that the defenders would soon run out of ammunition. But at the same time, 200 tons of cargo have already been prepared in Grana, which, in the event of successful actions by the "Philip battle group", will immediately be sent to the Hungarian capital. "The offensive plan on the northern bank of the Danube has also been slightly modified," Balk continued. — The 20th Panzer Division is to launch an offensive in a southerly direction from the vicinity of Udvar. I dare to hope that the crisis situation on the north coast will be resolved tomorrow."

At 1850 hours Wehler had a telephone conversation with Guderian. Wehler tried by all means to convince the commander of the ground forces of the need to make a quick decision and promptly provide assistance.

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relics of Budapest. But from the first minutes of the conversation it became clear that there could be no question of any freedom of action. The arguments that the ammunition and provisions in the city remained at best for two days did not work either:

"Such a situation forces us to make prompt decisions. It is for this reason that Balka's army group is planning a desperate sortie along the banks of the Danube. Today it was reported from the 96th Infantry Division that in several places on the banks of the Danube the enemy did not have time to erect defensive fortifications, and therefore we still have a chance of success. The people locked in Budapest will not forgive us if we don't take this chance. 7 The 11th Infantry Division advanced as far as possible through the Pilis Mountains during its offensive. A daring offensive along the banks of the Danube will make it possible to advance to Szentendre. Depending on the success of the advance in one of the two directions, the regimental group of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" is ready to strike towards Budapest either along the beret of the river or through the mountains. If the plan of the command of Army Group South succeeds, then the wounded will first be taken out of Budapest, and then ammunition will be delivered there from Szentendre.

And it was at this moment that Hitler's decision was announced, and the idea of another regrouping [At the SS Panzer Corps (as time will tell, which turned out to be fatal for him)] appears in the foreground. The docs stated this as follows:

"Colonel-General Guderian rejected the proposed plan, noting that there was an idea to regroup [U] the SS Panzer Corps, which would allow attacking Budapest together with Bright's Corps Group, located in the vicinity of Lake Velence. The commander of the army group pointed out that such a regrouping means a loss of time, while even one day could decide the fate of Budapest. The colonel-general shares these doubts. He believes whether it will be possible to hold Budapest for a long time is a big question.

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But at the same time, Guderian made it clear that the command of the Army Group "South" should be guided exclusively by the orders of the Fuhrer, and therefore it was necessary to regroup army group Balka: "The offensive must be launched as far south as possible, in a place where the enemy would not expect him at all." In response to this, Wöhler remarked that [U tank corps is constantly under Soviet attack, and therefore, he cannot simply leave the territory occupied with such difficulty. Someone must take his place. Otherwise, all the successes achieved during the previous operation (albeit conditional) will be in vain. Guderian coldly retorted: "The forces of the 3rd Cavalry and People's Artillery Corps are quite sufficient to hold this territory."

It had long been foreseen in Army Group South that the regrouping of the IV SS Panzer Corps was for Hitler a matter long since settled. Guderian himself tried not to express his own opinion. He already felt with might and main the nervousness of the Fuhrer, who almost daily rejected all his ideas and proposals. Guderian retreated into himself, foreseeing the imminent end of the Reich. It can be said that he was overcome by apathy. However, this did not prevent him from assuring the command of Army Group South every time that he shared their concerns and supported their point of view.

Lieutenant General Grolman informed the headquarters of the army group Balka about the conversation. At the same time, he pointed out the obvious shortcomings of the new plan of action: the loss of precious (for the Germans) time, unnecessary waste of the already

Herbert Gille, commander of the SS Mtankov Corps of the missing fuel, kriti

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the physical situation in Budapest, possible breakdowns of tanks during their transfer to remote "southern" territories. At the headquarters of the army group Balka not only agreed with these arguments, but even supplemented them: .

"1) Starting positions are too far from Budapest.

2) The transfer of the yU Panzer Corps to the location of the 1st Panzer Division will take too long due to the poor passability of the snow-covered and icy mountain roads. As a result, the regrouping itself can take at least 5 days. During the transfer, the enemy can regroup and send replenished units of the 8th Army to the army group Balka.

3) A daring offensive along the banks of the Danube is in fact the only way to break through to Budapest.

It is worth adding that literally the day before, during the discussion at the headquarters of the Balk army group of the "daring offensive of the Philipp battle group", very high hopes were pinned on him. Balk was once again filled with optimism. However, the headquarters of Army Group South added a fly in the ointment to this barrel of honey when it reported that there were reports that the 93rd Soviet Rifle Division was withdrawing from Soba. It was assumed that they were going to send her to the south bank in order to completely block any advance along the Danube. In response to this, the chief of staff of the Balka army group, Major General Gedke, retorted that there was still a chance for a breakthrough,

which would have been carried out by the 711th Infantry Division in two groups over the mountains: "We must take a chance, since the forces fighting in Budapest are coming to an end."

As a result, Major General Gedke summarized all the doubts expressed in one document and sent it in the form of a memorandum to the top. It is noteworthy that in this note he no longer spoke about 5, but 8 days, which were required to carry out the regrouping of the *SS* Panzer Division.

Late in the evening, General Wöhler again tried to convince Guderian that the operation planned earlier had every chance of success. At the same time, success could be achieved

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much earlier than the tanks would have had time to reach their original positions in the "south". Guderian again agreed with the above arguments. At 1:00 a.m., the Army Chief of Staff, General Wenck, confirmed that Army Group South could carry out its own design. The forward units located south of the *Gran* were put on alert, but did not go on the offensive. In the war diary of the Viking division, for Walter Wenck, the head, it is written: "By 24 hours, all units of the General Staff of the ground forces of the division were ready to launch an offensive against Germany. However, at midnight

an order comes - to postpone the offensive. There is supposedly an order from the Führer for this. We are losing the element of surprise."

The left wing of the IV *SS* Panzer Corps was also ready to attack. But they did not receive any orders. Gille is nervous but hesitant to start the operation at his own risk. He does not understand why she is being delayed if the Führer's consent has been given.

January 10, 1945 (Wednesday). The second day of operation "Konrad P"

"Light cold. Heavy snowfall. Bad visibility. Lorogs due to icing are either poorly passable or completely impassable."

Gille prepared the withdrawal of the Germania motorized regiment of the 5th *SS* Panzer Division Wiking as quickly as the situation at the front allowed. He planned to transfer a significant part of the tank division to the left flank so that the blow delivered through the Pilis Mountains towards Budapest would be extremely

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powerful. Another part of the "Vikings" was transferred to operational subordination to the command of the 6th Panzer Division.

In those days, one could hardly speak of a clear front line. It would be more correct to speak of a line of battles during which territories changed hands. And the line of battles itself was rather conditional, there were many gaps in it, which both combatants hurried to take advantage of. Gille wanted to use the remaining units of the Wiking *SS* division for a risky operation. He could not give up hope to break through to Budapest.

The divisional group Pape, which, in fact, included the 6th Panzer Division, changed its commander. The commander of the 239th assault artillery brigade (as the Germans called self-propelled artillery installations) was appointed its new chief. From now on, the divisional group, which, as before, was part of the IV *SS* Panzer Corps, began to bear the name of Budesmann.

Meanwhile, on the left flank, the first units of the tank corps were losing valuable watches. The combat log of the *SS* division "Viking" reported:

"At 3 o'clock in the morning, a messenger from Philip's battle group arrived ... We all, and Philip himself, consider the given order to be impracticable. The banks of the Danube can hardly be freed for a quiet

movement on them. The arriving general also does not know whether the offensive should begin or not. In the afternoon, the order to start the offensive finally arrives. At 2030 hours the division begins to advance. The enemy offers little resistance. He is completely broken. Difficult mountain territory, in fact the foothills of the Alps. At midnight, the first reports of our successes arrive. Prisoners in most cases are soldiers from artillery and mortar crews. No own losses. Westland is moving fast, Germany is slower.

As you can see, the German offensive, for no apparent reason, was actually postponed for another day. Is it any wonder that Gille found himself more and more often thinking,

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what do you need to do on your own? By the way, Balk did not devote a single line in his memoirs to this "idle".

Meanwhile, on the right flank of Balka's army corps, where [the cavalry corps] was supposed to advance, a protracted battle was going on, in which both the Red Army and the Germans suffered huge losses. All day at Zamoy, both Soviet and German soldiers had to fight in snowdrifts. Slippery ice that covered the whole earth for many kilometers did not allow fast movement. Despite the fierceness of the battle, no one managed to move forward. Some heights near Zamoy changed hands five times a day. The positions of the Soviet units were constantly fired upon by German artillery:

"GU Panzer Corps: fighting is still going on at Bichke, Mani and Zhambek. The enemy continues to advance, but this time his attacks are local in nature. All of them are reflected. Eicke's regiment was able to destroy 7 enemy tanks near Zhambek. The 145th battalion of the 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" has been holding its positions since the beginning of Operation Konrad. During the offensive, the 711th Infantry Regiment found itself in a forest, where, despite the most unfavorable conditions, it is gradually moving forward. Reinforced Regimental Group Westland is sent to reinforce the 711th Infantry Division to continue the offensive. Progress was slowed down by heavy snowfall and icy ground. Philip's group in the area between the Danube and the Pilis mountains northeast of the Gran encountered fierce enemy resistance. The enemy's defense has been broken, the group is advancing towards the southern spurs of the mountains. The offensive was stopped at the second defensive line of the enemy. The enemy stopped the advance of the tanks with gunfire from the opposite bank of the Danube from the town of Helemba.

Not a trace remained of the "daring offensive". But apart from General Bulk and his staff, no one was surprised by this circumstance. "Philip's battle group" was in the end you

needs to take cover from Soviet artillery fire in the nearby mountains. This was the price of delay. At the same time, on the northern bank of the Danube, the Germans managed to carry out a successful counterattack and stop the advance of the divisions of the 2nd Ukrainian Front to Komorna. As a result, the command of Army Group "South" was able to abandon its original plan and did not transfer the already battered 1st Cavalry Corps to the northern flank.

Meanwhile, the position of the German-Hungarian group was deteriorating before our eyes. Soviet troops were able to drive out the defending Germans from almost the entire territory of Pest (the eastern bridgehead). A new Soviet offensive was being prepared to completely drive the Germans out of this part of the city. How long the Germans could keep the defense in the Hungarian capital, no one knew. Due to heavy snowfalls, even the meager air supply stopped.

In the afternoon, General Wöhler, accompanied by an officer of the headquarters of Army Group South (Lieutenant Colonel Schaeffer), arrived at the headquarters of Army Group Balka. There was a discussion of the course of hostilities. The result of this conversation was a document called "Assessment of the situation of the army group Balka as of January 10, 1945, compiled by

after consulting with General Balk." Basically, the document looked like this:

"1) An offensive operation undertaken from the area southwest of Szekesfehervar and associated with a regrouping [At the SS Panzer Corps, could have great consequences, as it would force the Red Army units to be pulled away from the western bridgehead (Buda) Budapest. However, its beginning would entail the loss of at least five days.

2) It seemed doubtful that the group surrounded in Budapest could hold out for so long.

3) In the conditions of a five-day respite, the Soviet command could transfer troops to storm Budapest and take the western bridgehead.

4) The planned operation could only be fully successful after the release of Budapest.

5) It was necessary to continue the offensive through the Pilish Mountains, because:

a) it was the shortest way to Budapest;

B) the territory favored the breakthrough of the encircled group from Budapest.

In principle, everything was extremely clear and logical. However, Colonel General Guderian and the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, General Wenck, strongly pointed out that "the Fuhrer ordered

SS-Obergruppenführer regroup and move Pfeffer-Wildenbruch, commander of the epicenter of the fight, to the south." In some SS mountain rifle corps, as an exception, permission was given to those surrounded in Budapest

It was necessary to continue the offensive in the Pilis mountains, but only on the condition that by January 1] it would bring tangible tactical success, which could be developed to unlock Budapest.

Guderian himself prudently insisted on a "southern solution", since he was well acquainted with Hitler's character and knew that it was hardly possible to convince him, let alone change his decision. But he himself, probably, nevertheless was inclined to continue the offensive on the northern flank, because before that he had supported the "northern solution" more than once.

It was only a matter of time before the decision changed. How long would it take for obvious facts to become clear to Hitler?

Meanwhile, it was becoming clear to Army Group South that nothing had come of the "swift" attack of the "Philip battle group". Appearing between the Pilish Mountains and the Danube (as if from under the ground) the 93rd Soviet Rifle Division and vast minefields finally blocked the Germans' path along the Danube to the east.

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The Soviet counter-offensive on the northern bank of the Danube began to stop. But even though the units of the Red Army failed to take the final goal - Komorn, it was still a significant success for the Soviet troops. Not only were significant territories recaptured, but the path to Bratislava and the most important strategic goal, Vienna, was "opened up". In addition, the IV SS Panzer Corps could not feel safe for a minute, knowing that in its rear some 40-50 kilometers, albeit across the Danube, there was a powerful Soviet grouping. Taking into account the fact that the situation changed almost every day, no one ruled out the possibility of fighting "on two fronts."

The evening report sent from Army Group South to the High Command of the Ground Forces to Guderian no longer spoke of the need to continue the offensive through the Pilis Mountains. At the same time, the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" did not even get the opportunity to try to implement it. The report said: "It would be better to stop the offensive altogether than to regroup the troops." But in the end, everyone "agreed" that the most successful solution in this situation was the solution proposed by the Fuhrer, namely, the transfer of a significant part of the troops to the southern flank. But at the same time, the opinion was expressed that the 10th Mountain Rifle Corps had to make a breakthrough from Budapest. However, Hitler was adamant, the group surrounded in the Hungarian capital had to fight to the last bullet. No one was to leave Budapest.

January 11, 1945 (Thursday). Third day of Operation Konrad P

"The temperature is about 0 °C. Thaw. Snow with rain. Roads due to icing and snow drifts are difficult to pass.

Late at night, at 2:20 a.m., General Wenck informed the Chief of Staff of Army Group South that he had been trying for two hours to persuade Hitler to allow the command of the X SS Mountain Corps in Budapest to act in accordance with the situation, that is, give Pfeffer-Wildenbruch a free hand. "The only thing I do

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Tig," Wenck said in a telephone conversation, "that SS-Obergruppenführer Pfeffer Wildenbruch was awarded the Knight's Cross. But at the same time, the X SS Mountain Corps must remain in Budapest at all costs. If the night offensive planned by General Bulk does not bring the desired results, then tomorrow you will have to start regrouping troops. The only concession was Wenck's announcement that Budapest would be better supplied by air, including cargo gliders.

Five minutes later, Generals Wöhler and Balk were notified of this conversation. The beam was ordered to notify Pfeffer-Wildenbruch by radiogram that he must continue to hold the city. For the Germans in those conditions, the biggest trouble was not even the stubbornly resisting units of the Red Army, which at every opportunity went on the counterattack, but natural conditions. Sudden changes in temperature, frost, followed by a thaw, and then again by frost, actually made the mountain roads impassable. Slippery ice, snow slush, marsh slush, snowdrifts replaced each other almost once every half a day. For drivers of cars and armored vehicles, it was sometimes an impossible task to overcome several kilometers. In these circumstances, any advancing unit found itself in a clearly more losing situation than those who were on the defensive. The Red Army, bad weather and the slowness of the German command finally sealed the fate of Budapest.

The 4th Cavalry Brigade (1st Cavalry Corps), which was on the right flank, managed to penetrate into Zama and gain a foothold there, despite desperate counterattacks by Soviet infantry and tanks. In this situation, the very cargo gliders that were supposed to supply Budapest came to the rescue of the Red Army. Three of them were shot down over Soviet positions, which allowed the Red Army soldiers to immediately use the ammunition intended for the Budapest group. As before, it was difficult to determine who was advancing and who was defending. Attacks were almost instantly replaced by counterattacks.

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On the right flank [Near the SS Panzer Corps, Soviet units continued attacks of "local" significance. Almost all of them were repelled by the Germans without any problems. On the left flank of the general offensive, "Westland" was able to capture the village of Piliszentkerest, and "Philip's battle group" - the village of Pilismarot. But another part of the same "Philip battle group" remained lying on the banks of the Danube, not risking rising under the hurricane artillery fire, which

was conducted by the Red Army from the opposite bank. But, I repeat, at that time the biggest difficulty was the weather and landscape features. It was virtually impossible to attack waist-deep in sleet across the wooded mountains, and not only to the Germans. On the map at Hitler's Headquarters, everything looked different.

On the northern bank of the Danube, the recently advancing units of the Red Army slowly, fighting, retreated back. But at the same time, all attempts by the Germans to surround them ended in complete failure. And the battle in Budapest acquired some kind of apocalyptic character. The city turned into ruins, engulfed in flames.

_ Regiment of motorized infantry "Germany", directed by Gille to strengthen the right flank of Pilsen mountains, left their positions. Balk could no longer do anything with such "arbitrariness" of the SS general. He had to accept it as a fait accompli. It was the "Germania" regiment that was supposed to give the offensive in the Pilsen mountains a new impetus, which, according to Gille's idea, could allow the Germans to advance to Szentendre. At the same time, the entire 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" was to launch a massive offensive on the left flank of the IV SS Panzer Corps through the same Pilsen Mountains in the direction of Pilsbörösvár. It was written in the war diary that day: "Before this operation could begin, before the forward detachments could penetrate Pilisszentkereszt, the decision of the Führer became known, according to which [U SS Panzer Corps should be transferred to the south to prepare to a new offensive southwest of Szekesfehérvár. This order means the end of the offensive to the southeast

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through the Pilsen Mountains, and, consequently, the refusal to unblock Budapest."

From that moment on, the struggle of the command of the Balkan army group began for the SS tank corps to continue its offensive. It was at this time that the battle group "Germany" achieved certain tactical successes. "Germany" was able to pass the ridges of the Pilsen Mountains and was already preparing to reach their eastern slopes. Even "Philip's battle group" went on the offensive. The command of the army group, whose "time limit for success" was coming to an end, already wanted to breathe a sigh of relief. The offensive could be developed, especially since the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was to arrive on the northern flank to reinforce the IV SS Panzer Corps from day to day. It only took two days.

But despite all this, the headquarters of Army Group South began to prepare for the implementation of the "southern solution". And the approach of the 3rd cavalry brigade was fully included in these plans - it was supposed to replace the SS tank corps being transferred to the south of the Main Directorate.

Further, events began to develop not even by the hour, but by the minute. At 1340 hours, General Wenck reported to Hitler on the success of the offensive in the Pilsen Mountains. But Hitler did not want to hear about it. At 2:50 pm, the Chief of Staff of Army Group South notified General Gille of the WaffenSS that Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler had tried to contact him. Himmler demanded that Gille "finish the job." The telephone message said, in part: "The Reichsführer SS believes that it would be easier for him to change the mind of the Führer if the advance of the Pilsen Mountains had already led to significant success today. In this case, the command of the Army Group "South" would receive permission from the Führer to keep the epicenter of the struggle in the same place. If this does not happen, then regrouping will be inevitable."

Gille did everything in his power to continue the offensive in the Pilsen mountains. He, the headquarters, and most of the tankers could not understand why they should leave the occupied territories when the most difficult battles (kaza

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elk) were left behind when Budapest (as they believed) was within easy reach. As if in protest, Gille himself went to the front lines. In the army group's war diary

"South" preserved the following entry:

"At 4:30 p.m., it was reported that SS-Obergruppenführer Gille, accompanied by a staff officer, went to the regimental group of the SS Panzer Division "Viking" in order to directly direct the combat operations of "Germany" from there. It is located northwest of Pilisszent Kereszt. Enemy resistance is constantly increasing. Now the enemy sends separate tanks to the village and the mountain road. The arrival of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade is an urgent task. Operation Philippe's battle group no longer has any chance of success. The crew of the supply tug, which was hit on the way to Budapest, report that the enemy has occupied the entire northern coast and is firing at any moving object.

At 18:55, Army Group South headquarters informed the High Command of the Ground Forces about the intention to continue the offensive on the northern flank [At the SS Panzer Corps, since there were prospects for the success of this operation. Again there are words that the path through the Pilis Mountains is the only way to get through to Budapest. Wehler literally begs to postpone the planned regrouping for at least one day.

At 7:25 p.m., General Wöhler again talks by telephone with Guderian. And he again tries to convince Guderian of the correctness of the further offensive through the Pilish Mountains. When studying documents on this issue, a paradoxical and contradictory feeling arose, connected with how dependent, sometimes sometimes helpless, the German generals were in choosing a solution.

"To this, Colonel General Guderian replied that today the Führer had finally decided on the southern decision. If this were an order, then the SS Panzer Divisions would already be on

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would go back to new starting positions. The army group commander indicated that, perhaps, when Budapest was already at hand, it would be possible to try to change his mind. Moving away from Budapest will not help those who are there. X SS Mountain Corps could be completely destroyed. And the deterioration of the weather - rains, snow drifts, slippery ice - makes it very difficult to transfer troops to the south. The colonel-general replied that he was also very afraid of this, and therefore he would try to talk to the Führer again. However, the result of this conversation seems disappointing to him. It is possible that he will give the order to start implementing the southern solution." In response to this statement, General Wöhler asked: "Let the SS Panzer Division Viking try again tomorrow to continue the offensive in the Pilis Mountains, especially since the 3rd Cavalry Brigade will not be able to get here before night from 13 to January 14th.

At 20:10, Colonel-General Guderian informed the commander of the army group that the Führer, in spite of all the arguments presented, had ordered the implementation of the southern solution to begin. Now we need to regroup. The starting positions should be located south of Lake Velence, and it must be borne in mind that the farther these positions are from Bright's corps group, the better. To the question of the commander of the army group: "Did the operation of the Germania motorized rifle regiment not make any impression?" - General Colonel Guderian gave an affirmative answer: "The Führer fears that they will not be able to achieve any results in the mountains."

Ten minutes after this conversation, the chief of staff of Army Group South informed the command of Army Group Balka of the essence of the conversation and ordered the return of the Germania motorized rifle regiment. The starting positions for the new operation had to be chosen south of the positions occupied by the 1st Panzer Division, but as far as possible from the positions of the 1st Cavalry Corps, that is, somewhere in the area of the city of Varpalota.

Three hours after the order to start regrouping was received, Gille reported to the headquarters of Army Group South:

"Pilisszentkerest has been taken... The offensive is developing. Tomorrow we plan to take another settlement. Reconnaissance has been carried out in the area of \u200b\u200bKertelesh, it is possible to take it tonight. I received a radiogram from the Reichsfuehrer, in which he calls for the operation to be completed as soon as possible. The Chief of the General Staff informed him of the Fuhrer's special point of view. Let me know that the situation is developing very favourably."

Gille tried to explain that he could develop the offensive at night. At the same time, he claimed that during the capture of Pilisszentkerest, he actually did not meet serious resistance from the Soviet troops. The only obstacles to a quick advance to Budapest were bad weather and difficult terrain. "Together with the 3rd Cavalry Brigade, we would have made significant progress," Gille argued. - It takes only one day and one night to break the blockade of Budapest. Despite Hitler's orders, Gille still hoped that he could achieve the main goal of this entire military operation.

January 12, 1945 (Friday). The fourth day of operation "Konrad P"

"The thaw continues. Temperature 5 °C above zero. It is raining in places. Bad visibility. In some places, the roads are covered with ice. The rest of the roads are covered with mud and poorly passable. Street and railway bridges in the area of the position of the 5th Army were partially destroyed flood."

Around midnight, the chief of staff of Army Group South, Lieutenant General Grolman, called Hitler's Headquarters, where he found General Wenck who was not leaving there. He notified the Chief of the General Staff of the Ground Forces about Gille's message. At the same time, he relayed the words of Wöhler, who hoped that the words of the SS general "would not be misinterpreted." "Do not think that the new decision of the Fuhrer means nothing to me, but I consider it my duty to convey the message that has come to me." General Wenck promised that at the first opportunity he would report to Hitler on tactical success in the Pilis mountains.

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German armored personnel carriers retreat back to their original positions - Operation Konrad II finished

But already half an hour later it became clear that the die was cast and nothing could be changed. As expected, Hitler was not persuaded. They preferred to send only a short message from the General Staff of the Ground Forces to Army Group South: "Everything remains in force. Get ready to regroup."

Literally five minutes later, Lieutenant General Grolman contacted Gille and informed him that Hitler had not changed his mind. But Gille and this time decided not to give up hope for the continuation of the offensive. He asked to be connected to Himmler. The SS general, not without reason, believed that the Reichsfuehrer SS had more influence on Hitler than Guderian. The irony of fate was that the IV Panzer Corps did not manage to advance a meter that night. The attempt to take the village of Kerte Lesh by the forces of reconnaissance detachments was not successful either. A few detachments of Germans ran into fairly powerful Soviet forces. However, there were no significant changes in the line of battle that night anywhere - neither on the northern bank of the Danube, nor in the south, where

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led the 1st Cavalry Corps. Gille didn't have a single trump card left.

In Budapest itself, the Germans were almost completely driven out of Pest (the eastern bridgehead). Balk responded to requests for more supplies with a laconic phrase: "Use ammunition only in those sorties that can really end in success." In Budapest itself, they did not yet know that the tank divisions, whose radio communications could already be heard on the northern outskirts of the city, would not come to their rescue. Gille could do nothing more

to do, he was forced to obey the order of the Fuehrer. Full of indignation, he began to prepare the retreat of the Main Directorate of the tank corps. Operation "Konrad 11" ended in nothing.

Early in the morning, at 3 o'clock, a telegram arrived from the High Command of the Ground Forces, in which it was ordered to begin preparations for a new operation "on the southern flank of the army group Balka." The telegram itself said:

"The purpose of the new military operation is to cut off the enemy troops between the Danube and the Vertes Mountains, as a result of which the relationship with the troops in Budapest will be restored. The success of the operation will depend on how quickly our troops can break through to the Danube, in order to then continue the offensive both in the south and in the north. Surprise is the decisive factor in this operation. By continuing to advance with more modest forces in the same directions, one can create the appearance that the strategic plans remain the same. The territory occupied during the previous offensive, especially the passes of the Vertesh mountains, must be held at any cost. Pinning down enemy forces along the entire front will make it impossible for him to promptly transfer the necessary forces to the site of a new offensive. The order provides for the organization of deceptive maneuvers and the observance of the utmost secrecy, which will allow using the effect of surprise. The forward detachments will reveal themselves at the very last moment, when

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offensive will begin. To reinforce the 1st Panzer Division, the army group should send the 509th Tank Battalion ("Tigers"), the 1st Battalion of the 24th Regiment ("Panthers"), as well as the 303rd Assault Gun Brigade, 19th mortar brigade, a company of flamethrower tanks, and a company of Taifu NOV.

After reading these lines, the question naturally arises: why did the Germans not put these forces into battle immediately, at the beginning of Operation Konrad, but waited for it to acquire the third serial number? Apparently, the answer to it will remain a mystery.

At 12:40 pm, the headquarters of the army group Balka distributed a special document: according to the "order of Colonel General Guderian", the passages and roads in the Pilish mountains were to be held, as before. "In order to preserve the camouflage, it is necessary to simulate offensive attempts and conduct an imaginary radio exchange." Attention is drawn to the wording "by order of Colonel-General Guderian". Apparently, neither Wöhler nor Balk were going to take responsibility for the outcome of the new operation.

Units [At the SS Panzer Corps were ordered to leave their positions after dark. The German infantry regiment was to withdraw first. He immediately headed south. Thus began preparations for the third attempt to unblock Budapest, which went down in history under the name "Operation Konrad II".

At this time, the 3rd Cavalry Brigade was already on the march. A certain exchange was carried out - instead of it [the cavalry corps was supposed to pour into itself a part [U the SS tank corps. Accordingly, the command posts changed places: one moved to Tata, the other to Itimer. So it was supposed to use already established connections for the future operation. |

The order to regroup arrived in part, advancing in the Pilis mountains, at about 20 hours. Then the staff officer of the SS division "Viking", without hiding his disappointment, wrote in the combat log: "Absolutely incomprehensible. The division could during the next breakthrough reached

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The end of the operation "Konrad I" - only a few kilometers left to Budapest

sip Budapest. The strength of the enemy is already known. We do not expect flank attacks ... We must abandon our goal when we have almost reached it.

Almost all the actions taken in the first days of January 1945 turned out to be pointless. Hitler did not want to reckon with either the needless losses or the hardships that his SS tankers needlessly endured. The same, being on the hills near Piliszentkerest, already clearly saw the glow of the fires blazing in Budapest and distinctly heard the artillery cannonade. The command and personnel of the Viking division were "killed on the spot" by the decision taken at the top. Tankers began to lose confidence in the Fuhrer. The chief of staff of the SS division "Viking" accurately and only in general terms described the mood that prevailed not only in the headquarters, but in all units: "The city was 17 kilometers from us. Under these conditions, the order to retreat was like an exploding bomb. He destroyed all hope. Balk and Gille should have done everything they could to prevent this from happening."

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However, Balk, unlike Gille, did not even think of doing anything. He preferred to report to the Fuhrer's Headquarters only what needed to be reported. The name Balka was generally very rare in the war diary due to the advance through the Pilis Mountains.

Chapter 5 OPERATION KONRAD 111

On the night of January 12-13, units of the SS Panzer Corps, starting with the Germania Regiment, began to withdraw to new positions. The "Germany" was followed by the rest of the Viking division, the 711th and 96th Infantry Divisions. Their positions were to be taken by the approaching 3rd Cavalry Brigade. For some time, one battalion from the divisions "Viking" and "Totenkopf" was supposed to remain in the Pilis mountains. They were supposed to hold the already captured territory until the moment when the cavalry brigade completely took up its positions.

The tanks [At the SS Corps were ordered to be loaded onto trains south of Comorn. This was supposed to disorientate Soviet intelligence. In fact, the tanks were supposed to be transferred to the Veszprem area. At the same time, it should be noted that Army Group South did not have a sufficient number of echelons to quickly transfer all the necessary equipment. Only two echelons could be sent daily. But in reality it was just a red herring. The main forces [At the SS Panzer Corps were to reach Veszprem under their own power. Their transfer could only be carried out along the Tata-Nagyigmánd highway. The rest of the roads were difficult to pass, and the transfer along them would have taken much more time. The corps command had to put up with the fact that the regrouping required huge expenditures of fuel, which was already in short supply. The start of the general offensive was scheduled for the early morning of 18 January. At the same time, the offensive was to be carried out "with all available forces."

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During the regrouping, the temperature was about zero degrees. Almost all the time the sky was cloudless, but heavy fog helped to mask the movements of German tanks. However, on January 15, severe frosts unexpectedly struck. Roads again iced up and became almost impassable in mountainous areas. Nevertheless, the Germans managed to regroup without suffering almost any losses. The Soviet units in the area of the Pilis Mountains, Bichke and Zamoya did not take any active actions. Taking advantage of the unexpected respite, they strengthened their defensive lines. Moreover, the Soviet command itself planned to regroup, significantly strengthening the units on the defensive in the Pilis Mountains and on both sides of Zamoya. Despite active air reconnaissance, the "disappearance" from the front line somehow slipped away from the Soviet command [At the SS Panzer Corps. It seemed that the Germans managed to transfer unnoticed tank and infantry divisions to the southern flank of the army group Balka. Soviet intelligence interpreted the active movements of railway trains near Comorn as the transfer of tank units to the north, to the location of Army Group A (Army Group Center), that is, to that sector of the front where the general Soviet offensive began in mid-January. nie.

Meanwhile, by the evening of January 13 [the cavalry corps had taken command of the SS Panzer divisions. Most of the tanks were still on the march, but the forward detachments were already at the place of the intended assembly, from where they were supposed to go to their original positions. The headquarters itself [At the SS Panzer Corps was located in the immediate vicinity of the front - in the forest 3 kilometers northwest of the northern shore of Lake Balaton (approximately 10 kilometers southeast of Veszprem). It was from there that the command of the new operation was to be conducted. On the same day, the headquarters of Army Group South informed the High Command of the Ground Forces about the plan for the upcoming operation Konrad 1. This plan consisted of several points:

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1) [At the SS Panzer Corps, with the forces of two panzer divisions ("Dead Head" and "Viking"), with the support of the 1st Panzer Division, was supposed to deliver the main blow.

2) First of all, the SS Viking division was supposed to capture a bridgehead along the Sharviz Canal! near Sharkerestur and Aba, and the SS division "Dead Head" - to occupy the territory on both sides of the village of Fövényi, while the 1st Panzer Division would go to the southern outskirts of Szekesfehevar.

3) At the same time, the right flank of the advancing units was to be covered by special assault units of the 1st, 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions, which were gradually to move in the direction of the Shio Canal, going from Lake Balaton to Shimontornje.

4) In order to mislead Soviet intelligence, units of the III Panzer Corps (the main units of the 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions) were to begin an operation north of Szekesfehevar the day before the main offensive. This distraction was supposed to force the Soviet units to withdraw from the territories located south of the city, which would make it easier for the strike

forces.

5) Having occupied a bridgehead, [At the SS Panzer Corps was to advance south of Lake Velence. Now the offensive was to develop in a northwestern direction. The "Viking" division was to reach the Danube at Erchi, the "Totenkopf" division - to Rakeresttur, and the 1st Panzer Division - to Barachka.

6) The tank divisions were to be followed by the 4th cavalry brigade, which was assigned the function of clearing the territories from the remaining Soviet detachments.

7) The 2nd Panzer Army, which arrived at Balaton, was supposed to develop the offensive. It was assumed that by January 17, the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" would be pulled up to Veszprem? depending

Small rivers with well-maintained and fortified banks are traditionally called canals in Hungary. In this case and further in the text, we are not talking about artificial structures, but about the rivers connecting the Danube with a number of lakes (Velence, Balaton).

2 The German name of the divisions is "Nosy - ypa Yueshysyeteyyeg". In domestic literature, for some reason, they prefer not to translate it.

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from the situation, she had to either advance on neighboring sectors of the front, or hold a defensive line north of Szekesfehevar. |

In the meantime, the Soviet command carried out a regrouping of troops, during which the units located near Zamoy and in the Pilis mountains were reinforced. In the mountains, it was even supposed to launch a counteroffensive. On January 14, Soviet troops were able to recapture Pilishszentkerest from the Germans. The Soviet command intended at all costs "to amputate the

Finger to Budapest. At the same time, Marshal Tolbukhin ordered the construction of a defense line in depth north of Szekesfehervar, which included not only minefields, trenches, anti-tank barriers, but also "nests" specially equipped for mortars and anti-tank guns. Military intuition prompted Tolbukhin that soon fierce battles would have to be waged here. At the same time, he increased pressure on the western foothold in Budapest.

The besieged German-Hungarian group was losing several hundred soldiers every day. Balk once again tried to rectify the situation, but was only able to get another promise to "better supply Budapest by air". At some point, the High Command of the Ground Forces was not up to Budapest. The rapid Soviet offensive in fact, in a few days, threatened the complete annihilation of Army Group A, located in Poland. Late on the evening of January 14, General Wenck telephoned the headquarters of Army Group South. Outlining the general situation on the Eastern Front, he stated that, in his opinion, in the absence of [the SS Panzer Corps, the command of Army Group South was free to choose the way to save Budapest. Almost immediately, a decision was made to "break through the encircled grouping from Budapest as soon as possible, while it can still be done unexpectedly." Time passed, and at 3 o'clock in the morning (already January 15) Wenck announced that [The SS Panzer Corps would remain at the disposal of Army Group South, and the 2nd Panzer Army would be reinforced by the Bosnian 13th Mountain Division

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SS "Handzhar" (1st Croatian SS division). By this time, Soviet troops had almost completely occupied Pest.

The transfer of the 1U SS Panzer Corps, despite temperature fluctuations and constant weather changes, proceeded more or less according to plan. The 3rd Panzer Division was also sent to the assembly point, which up to that moment had been stationed on the sector of the front to the north-west of Zamoy. The initial consolidation of armored units was to take place north of Varpalota. As a result, the command of the 1st SS Panzer Corps had at its disposal four tank divisions (1st Panzer, 3rd Panzer, 3rd Panzer SS "Dead Head" and 5th Panzer SS "Viking"). The starting positions for the offensive were first to be "probed" by the 403rd People's Artillery Corps and the 17th People's Mortar Brigade. They infiltrated their starting positions under the cover of darkness, in the strictest secrecy and with the utmost disguise.

Meanwhile, the general situation on the Eastern Front forced on January 17, 1945, the command of Army Group South to consider a plan to "return". The headquarters of the Army Group "South" even received an order to prepare the transfer of tank units to the Bratislava region, from where they were to be sent by rail to Poland. However, this next tank march would completely put an end to fuel supplies. While the divisions of the corps were moving south, towards Varpalota, Guderian, despite the support, did not allow him to successfully carry out the offensive through trying to convince Hitler to throw them into Poland.

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Insufficient level of infantry

But, as before, Hitler was not going to change his mind. At 18:25, the Fuhrer's order was transmitted from the General Staff of the Ground Forces to the headquarters of the Army Group "South": "Prepare for the planned offensive." In order for Operation Konrad III to be crowned with success, it was decided to simultaneously launch a German counter-offensive on the northern bank of the Danube. To do this, the 8th and 20th tank divisions were sent there.

Now it has become completely clear that the operation "Konrad: Pl" will still take place. At 7:25 p.m., General Wöhler received a phone call from Guderian and conveyed the Fuhrer's order: "The command of the X SS Mountain Corps can independently make decisions regarding the eastern bridgehead in Budapest." Such a decision actually did not change anything, since Pest, which was actually allowed to be left, was almost completely taken with the Soviet troops without Hitler's order. The command of the army group Balka had no choice but to give the order: January 18, 1945 at 5 o'clock in the morning to start the operation "Konrad Sh". The order was transmitted in parts on January 17 at 23:10.

January 18, 1945 (Thursday). First day of Operation Konrad III

"Temperature - 5 °C. Mainly cloudy. Fog and light snowfall in places. Road condition - unchanged."

According to the given order, at 5 o'clock in the morning [U tank corps and the right wing of Bright's corps group (23rd Panzer Division) launched an offensive on the segment between Lake Balaton and Sharkerestes.

The farthest forward, directly south of Balaton, managed to advance the 3rd Panzer Division, commanded by Major General Zet. Having almost instantly overcome the minefields that were intended for infantry, and therefore were safe for tanks, this division managed to quickly take Lepshen and reach the settlement of Enying. At 1530 hours the advanced units of the 3rd Panzer Division were already at Degas. And by 6 p.m. they controlled the coast of the Sharviz Canal west of Szentmiklós. In the following hours, the 3rd Panzer Division

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succeeded in occupying a foothold on the eastern bank of the canal. The division advanced rapidly. The offensive of all units developed like a fan. The forward units of the 1st, 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions rushed to the south and southeast. Flank cover was provided by special reconnaissance battalions.

The 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking", which was advancing from the Chaiyaga region, had to not only break through the minefields and break through the wire fences, which were fired with electric current, but also break the fierce resistance of the Soviet infantry in the vicinity of Balatonfőkajara. These positions were captured only by noon. At the same time, the main body of the division was able to break through the Sharviz Canal, bypassing it from the south, just north of Kaloz, and creating a bridgehead there from which it was possible to develop the offensive.

The 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf" attacked the Soviet positions from two sides of Berkhida. The positions of the Red Army were almost immediately broken through in the areas of Fülei Yöñö. Having launched a flank attack, the right wing of the "Dead Head" was able to take Tats by 14 o'clock, creating a springboard for the development of an offensive on the Maly Canal, which ran parallel to Sharviz. Meanwhile, the left wing of the division penetrated Falubattyan. Forcing the canal required special devices, which slowed down the advance of the "Dead Head".

The 1st Panzer Division broke through the minefields in the direction of Yoshi. By noon, she reached the Sharviz Canal southeast of Sharszentmihai. It was there that the bridgehead was formed. Almost immediately, pontoon bridges began to be built, thanks to which the tanks could cross the canal. The second attack group of the 1st Panzer Division was directed due east in the direction of Szekesfehérvár. Before she could begin the assault on the Palmayor station, passages had to be made in the minefields. Reflecting the German offensive, the Soviet units suffered heavy losses.

As the Germans moved from south to north, the resistance of the Soviet units increased. As a consequence, the left

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the IV wing of the SS Panzer Corps moved forward much more slowly than the right (southern) wing. The German offensive in the eastern direction was significantly hampered by the 4th Soviet Guards Army, transferred from the reserve near Szekesfehervar. German air reconnaissance also reported that many Soviet units were leaving their positions from the vicinity of Bicke and Budapest and rushing south, to the site of a tank breakthrough. With all this, it should be noted that, compared with the German offensive northeast of Balaton, the offensive from the southern shores of the lake of the 3rd Hungarian army was not crowned with any significant success. Marshal Tolbukhin continued to hold significant forces on the stretch between Lake Balaton and the Drava River.

By then the 23rd Panzer Division had taken Sarkerestes and had reached the hills a few kilometers from Székesfehérvár. The German tanks intended to bypass the city from the east, but faced fierce resistance from the Red Army units. In addition, vast minefields made it difficult to move forward. Under these conditions, the attack of the 1st Hungarian Hussar Division, undertaken from Bokod and Kecsked, bogged down. Having suffered huge losses, the Hungarians were not able to make significant progress.

The Soviet command was not going to be limited only to defensive actions. Almost simultaneously with the offensive on the southern flank, a powerful Soviet counterattack was launched in the Pilis Mountains. With strong artillery support, several divisions were thrown into the offensive. The Germans failed to hold on to the recently conquered territories. At the same time, German counterattacks were launched on the northern bank of the Danube. The Germans managed to push the Soviet troops back east to Karva, which significantly reduced the threat to the German units in the Pilis mountains. It was now difficult for the Soviet troops to EXIT THEM INTO THE ROOM.

On the same day, German and Hungarian troops left Pest (eastern bridgehead). On the one hand, this allows

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they could concentrate their forces on the defense of Buda (the western bridgehead), but on the other hand, Soviet artillery could fire more effectively at the units accumulated in Buda.

If we characterize the first day of Operation Konrad II, then for the Germans it was very successful. They were able to achieve all their goals. Now they planned to take advantage of the effect of surprise as quickly as possible. The crew of the reconnaissance vehicle, until the Soviet command clarified the situation

effective countermeasures.

At about 10 p.m. the headquarters of the army group Balka gave the order, if possible, to go to the Danube near Erchi that same night. This breakthrough was supposed to prevent the transfer of part of the Soviet troops from Mesht to Buda. Two hours later, tactical plans for the following day were reported to the High Command of the Ground Forces:

"1) throughout the night, continue the offensive from the bridgeheads on the banks of the Sharviz Canal in the east and northeast directions in order to capture the territory between Lake Velence and Erchi, on which new bridgeheads are to be created;

2) to create fortified bridgeheads for the forward units of the tank divisions on the Shio Canal so that Soviet attacks from the south could be repelled; |

3) launch an offensive by the forces of the 1st Cavalry Corps north of the village of Man, which should prevent the regrouping of Soviet troops;

4) start preparations in Budapest for a breakthrough in the direction of the Budaörs airfield. At the same time, try to restore the former front line. Breakthrough should start only after

how the command of Army Group South will issue a special order.

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January 19, 1945 (Friday). The second day of operation "Konrad III"

"The temperature is 4 °C. Mainly cloudy. Light snowfall in the afternoon. Road conditions unchanged."

Tank reconnaissance battalions specially assigned to cover the right flank reached the Shio Canal, but failed to create any bridgehead on it. Their forces were clearly not enough even to simply cover the territory with a length of 75 kilometers. But this did not rule out minor tactical successes of the Germans. The reconnaissance battalion of the 1st Panzer Division was able to take the city of Siofok on the southern shores of Lake Balaton. 30 kilometers to the east, the settlement of Meze Komar was taken. The tank reconnaissance battalion of the 3rd division was able to gain a foothold on the northeastern bank of the Shio Canal. The reconnaissance battalion of the 23rd Panzer Division was able to repel the Soviet counterattacks near Shar-Egres, after which it conducted reconnaissance in the territory between the Sharviz Canal and the Danube, finding out that Red Army detachments were entrenched on the hills 8 kilometers northwest of Dunafejoldvar .

At dawn, the 3rd Panzer Division continued to move northeast. During the offensive, she took Herzegfalva; partly managed to penetrate into the settlement of Dunapentele held by the Soviet troops. At 0530 hours, the SS Viking Division, having received reinforcements, began to move east from Charkerestur. At the same time, she managed to repulse the Soviet flank counterattacks, which were undertaken by tanks from the vicinity of Sheregeyesh. Toward evening, the whole area to the east of Saroshd, several kilometers long, was under the control of the "Vikings". The right wing of the division was literally halfway to Perkata. At the same time, the left wing of the "Vikings" ran into powerful Soviet resistance near Aba, which they never managed to break. To remedy the situation, a reconnaissance divisional tank battalion was put into action.

The 3rd SS Panzer Division "Dead Head" crossed the canal near Tats and Falubattyán the longest. Despite the delay, at 7 hours 35 minutes, the division's tanks again moved into

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offensive. During a bloody battle, the SS managed to destroy the Soviet anti-tank guns and capture the village of Föven. By evening, the "Dead Head" division controlled the space for several kilometers west of Sheregeyesh.

Despite the fact that the headquarters of Army Group South were quite satisfied with the developing offensive, somewhat different moods reigned in the Army Group Balka. At 5:15 p.m., Balk reported, not without irritation: "Due to the extremely unsatisfactory receipt of information, the SS panzer divisions do not allow us to create a general idea of the development of the offensive. To clarify the picture of the hostilities, SS Obergruppenführer Gille went to the place. Two hours later, Balk was provided with all the necessary information. And at 21 o'clock Balk, in a conversation with Wöhler, did not mention a word about problems in the system communications and alerts.

The advance units of the 1st Panzer Division tried that day to seize the area south of Szekesfehérvár to Lake Velence. Here they had to face fierce resistance from the Soviet units. As a result, by the evening only Dinnyesh, located at the southern end of the lake, was taken. At the same time, the tank division had to cover a very long northern flank, which stretched from Lake Velence to Palmayor. It was in this weak spot that the Soviet troops repeatedly tried to launch a counterattack.

As the German offensive developed, Soviet troops more than once tried to hit the tank wedges from the flanks. But for the most part, these were only local actions that were not of a general nature. Things have not yet reached the point of a single massive Soviet counter-offensive. However, at the headquarters of the armies "South" they already considered such a possibility: "After the enemy suffered a widespread defeat the day before, he realized the danger posed by our offensive to his own operation. Therefore, troops are being transferred from the north and south in the direction of our advance. But so far these measures are not in the nature of a single counter-offensive."

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The 23rd Panzer Division, which was part of Bright's corps group, launched an offensive that dragged on into the night at about 1930 hours, which was directed along the road leading from Chora to Szekesfehervar. A little further north, the offensive was developed by the divisional group Holste.

Almost all the advancing German units were subjected to constant air attacks, which were carried out by the Soviet heavy zeender, the commander of the 22nd attack aircraft, covered by the SS Volunteer Division "Maria" by fighters. However, this is not Theresa, besieged in Budapest, could inflict significant | losses to the forces of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps. Moreover, in many respects it was a risky undertaking for the Soviet air forces, since during the raids the Luftwaffe fighters managed to shoot down about 20 Soviet aircraft. The situation in the sky changed, as the 4th Luftwaffe Air Fleet was brought up to Budapest. However, his main task was to supply the Hungarian capital by air.

To save the situation, the Soviet command sent the 18th Tank Corps, which had previously been located near Zhambek, and parts of the 7th Guards Mechanized Corps to Aba. They were joined by three infantry divisions transferred from Finland (by that time out of the war). It was a significant force, but they did not have a general plan of counteroffensive. However, the forces of the Soviet troops were by no means running out. The 5th Guards Cavalry Corps, the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps, as well as units of the 1st Guards Mechanized Corps were still in reserve.

However, General Balk, with his inherent unjustified optimism, day reported: "It seems that the main forces of the enemy have already been defeated." General

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Wöhler was not inclined to share such a belief. He relied on air reconnaissance data, which reported on the massive movement of Soviet units. However, he did not know where and when they would be sent. At 5:45 p.m., the headquarters of Army Group South reported to the High Command: "The enemy forces reported by air reconnaissance are not clear. There are reports of 2,000 vehicles moving towards Budapest from our offensive area, as well as 600 vehicles moving in the opposite direction to the south: In the first case, we can talk about the withdrawal of supplies, in the second - about - being fighting

strength."

The Germans have so far managed to use the unexpected factor

`nosti and penetrate deeply into Soviet positions. The 135th Soviet Rifle Corps, which held the neighborhood of Szekesfehervar from the very beginning, was divided into several groups and thrown back into the depths of the city. The threat of a split into two parts hung over the 3rd Ukrainian Front. In order to avoid encirclement, disastrous in that situation, some Soviet units had to make a breakthrough.

In this situation, Marshal Tolbukhin was afraid not so much of a German breakthrough in a northerly direction to Budapest, but that some of his divisions could be taken in pincers from

Balaton, where the Panzer Corps advanced on one side, and the 2nd German Panzer Army on the other side (along the southern coast of Balaton).

Seeing the danger of encirclement, Tolbukhin even considered the possibility of withdrawing troops to the eastern bank of the Danube (here the Danube flowed "vertically" and not "horizontally" as north of Budapest). If the German 2nd Panzer Army (as planned at the beginning) had gone on the offensive, then the situation would have been quite real when units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front would have been thrown back from Western Hungary, and Budapest would have been released. However, the German command decided to ignore this chance. This was caused, most likely, by a clear overestimation of the capabilities of German tank divisions and a clear underestimation of the combat capability of Soviet soldiers. In addition, in this situation, the High Command did not plan at all

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defeat of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. The [Panzer Corps'] target was exclusively Budapest, while the 2nd Panzer Army was "reserved" for other ("more promising") missions. When the SS divisions were moving towards the banks of the Danube, the possibility of using the 2nd Panzer Army was still being considered. The fact is that tank reconnaissance battalions found out that there were no large Soviet formations on the southern shores of Lake Balaton, in particular, near Siofok. And only then the command of the 2nd Panzer Army received an order to prepare an offensive against Kaposvár. But even this operation was planned solely in order to pin down the forces of the Red Army in this area and prevent their transfer either in the direction of Budapest or to the northern shores of Balaton, where another German offensive was developing. But the very order on the preparation of the German military operation already spoke of the possible defeat of the 57th Soviet Rifle and 1st Bulgarian armies. |

In this regard, General Wöhler, in his evening summary, reported on the following moves planned for January 20:

"1) The forces of the SS divisions "Viking" and "Totenkopf" must concentrate to break through the Soviet positions between the Danube and Lake Velence.

2) It is necessary to encircle or push back the Soviet troops from Valya until the Soviet command uses the 5th Guards Mechanized Corps and other parts of the operational response.

3) The 3rd Panzer Division should strike in the direction of the Danube, and then launch an offensive along its bank to the north, covering the rear from the south and the flank from the east, where Soviet troops were concentrated in the Shimontorny area.

4) The 1st Panzer Division, under cover from the northern flank, is to destroy the Soviet troops in Szekesfeharvar.

5) The 3rd Panzer Corps (Byta Corps Group) must continue its offensive north of Szekesfeharvar.

6) The 1st Cavalry Corps must immediately begin preparations for an offensive by the forces of the 3rd Cavalry Brigade and the 6th Tank Corps in the direction of Bichke -

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A tank corps on the offensive

Man. Depending on the development of the general offensive, further advance is possible either to the east or to the south."

In addition, the headquarters of the army group Balka planned an offensive by two Hungarian infantry battalions, which was to be carried out on the ice of Lake Balaton in the area of Jamardy and Tihany.

Only on the third day of the operation was it supposed to destroy the Soviet troops holding positions south of Lake Velence. This was supposed to be the key to the success of the German offensive in the northeast direction, towards Budapest.

January 20, 1945 (Saturday). Third day of Operation Konrad P

"Light cold. Bad visibility. From time to time it becomes clear. The roads are covered with ice, and because of the snow that has fallen, they are virtually impassable."

The weakest point in the "fan" of the German offensive was the line of defense along the Shio Canal, which ran from Siofok to Mező Komárom. It was actually held only by the 25th Hungarian Infantry Regiment. It was here that Marshal Tolbukhin decided to strike. For the Germans, the situation was complicated by the fact that the Hungarian regiment had just

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arrived at the positions where he replaced the German tank reconnaissance battalion. Shortly before this, German tankers managed to push back the insignificant forces of the Red Army to the east during a fierce battle. Now the Soviet troops were concentrating in the triangle formed by the settlements of Simontornya-Tsetse-Pálfa. The concentration of Soviet troops was almost immediately noticed by German pilots. As a result, the decision was made at the headquarters of the Balka army group not to withdraw the reconnaissance battalion of the 23rd Panzer Division from here.

In the meantime, by 15:15, the advance units of the 3rd Panzer Division had reached a fork in the road, located 5 kilometers south of Adony. The main forces of the division at that moment were able to repel the Soviet counterattack near Dunapentele. After repulsing the Soviet counterattack, the Germans managed to sink five Soviet tugboats. But very soon this step was greatly regretted - the flooded Soviet ships actually blocked the Danube and made it impossible to communicate along the river, which significantly limited the combat capabilities of the division.

At the headquarters [at the SS Panzer Corps, they were very optimistic about the future. The fact is that the SS tankmen managed to squeeze several Soviet corps in the Kish-Pécs-Aba-Seregnyesh triangle, which could not develop a strategic initiative. These were the 18th Soviet tank corps, the UP Guards mechanized corps, and a rifle corps that had just been transferred from the Finnish front. The position of the Soviet units was complicated by the fact that the divisions "Viking" and "Totenkopf" actually cut them off from the supply route. In addition, a few hours before that, the "Vikings" took Abu. Under these conditions, it was necessary to counterattack without fail.

At first, the Germans planned that the spearhead of the Soviet counterattack would be intercepted by the SS Viking division. At the same time, the Soviet counterattack was to be aimed at the space between Aba and Sharoshd. Only by moving in a southeasterly direction could the Soviet units escape encirclement and reunite with the rest of the divisions of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. The Vikings didn't waste time either.

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nor: at 14 o'clock they took Pécs, where they took up a circular defense, preparing to repel the Soviet counteroffensive.

In this area, the front line actually ceased to exist. It was difficult even to say who was surrounded. The Germans tried with all their might to break through to the roads and establish their supply. This most acutely concerned the situation in which the division "Totenkopf" found itself. At 1540 hours the tankers of this SS division attempted to carry out reconnaissance in force in the vicinity of Seregnyesh. But the most fierce fighting broke out in the Aba area. Soviet soldiers fought to the death there, preventing the Germans from breaking through to the south, because if this happened, the Soviet troops here would be cut off from the main forces,

gathering in the east. Under the circumstances, both the Germans and the Red Army found themselves in a stalemate — they were all cut off from supplies.

During a fierce battle, the "Dead Head" managed to take Sheregeyesh. The swampy terrain surrounding this settlement forced the tank units of the division to stretch too far to the north. General Balk, in contrast to the headquarters of Army Group South, tried to resist such a development of events. But it was the extension of the positions of the "Totenkopf" in the northern direction that allowed this SS Panzer Division not only to prepare for another strike to the east, but also to cover the flank of the SS division "Viking", which allowed the latter to develop a further offensive to the south. The tank reconnaissance detachment of the "Vikings" was able to move forward to the village of Sabolch, while the tank units of the "Totenkopf" moved forward along the southern shore of Lake Velence. They immediately took Gardon and by evening approached the outskirts of Kis-Velence.

It is impossible not to mention one indicative fact that perfectly characterizes the relationship between Balk and Gille. At 10 o'clock, when the offensive was actually unfolding, Balk complained to General Wöhler that the overall picture of the battle was suffering from the fact that the IV SS Panzer Corps, especially the Viking and Totenkopf divisions, "informed the army extremely unsatisfactorily group about

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his promotion." At the same time, he reported that the SS division "Viking" in the segment between Perkata and Sharkerestur had to launch an offensive in several places in order to make its way to the north (and this was reported in conditions when the division launched an offensive in the south east direction). At the same time, the command [Near the SS Panzer Corps was to launch an offensive to the east with the forces of the Totenkopf Division in the direction of the Commander of the 8th Cavalry Division Adoni (that is, where the SS Airborne Forces Florian Geyer lochen Rumor

it was the Viking division that moved). Balk insisted on such a scenario, since he believed that first it was necessary to destroy the enemy from the flanks, since he could throw all available forces on the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking". The plan proposed by Bulk had no real basis. In fact, he was just sucked from the finger. After that, Balk was indignant for half a day that he had not received any messages from the "Dead Head" division about the advance from Dunapentele to Adoni. That is, Balk simply did not know (or did not want to know) that the "Dead Head" was moving not towards the Danube, but along the southern bank of the Velence.

The 1st Panzer Division covered the left flank near Szekesfehervar, coming closer than other German formations to this city, the approaches to which were desperately held by Soviet units. For the Red Army, the fact that the Germans were able to cut the road linking Szekesfehervar with Sheregeyesh was fatal. For the supply of Soviet units in marshy, virtually impassable terrain, this road was of exceptional importance. For this reason, the Soviet command during January 20, 1945, more than once gave the order to launch a counterattack from Szekesfehervar or from the "southern" positions,

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to regain control of this track. But all attempts to fulfill it were unsuccessful. The 1st Panzer Division was able to repel all Soviet counterattacks.

To the north of Szekesfehervar, the battle-weary 23rd Panzer Division (III Panzer Corps) was able to recapture very little territory from the Soviet units. At the same time, the strike group of the 1st Cavalry Corps, which was concentrating between the settlements of Bichke and Man, was ready to launch an attack on Soviet positions no earlier than January 21. In Budapest, an attempt by a German-Hungarian group to recapture the island of Margarita from the Soviet units! ended in complete failure, which was of strategic importance.

To continue the offensive at the headquarters of the army group Balka and at the headquarters [At the tank corps, the following measures were planned:

1) For better organization of supply, the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division, located near the Shio Canal, was transferred to the command [At the SS Panzer Corps. In addition, it was planned to transfer several more Hungarian units to this area, which would make it possible to remove the tank reconnaissance battalion of the 23rd DIVISION from these positions.

2) The headquarters of the Panzergrenadier Division "Feldherrnhalle" also passed into submission to the command of the 1U SS Panzer Corps. He was instructed to hold positions at the same Shio channel. Later, units of the 3rd Hungarian Army were to arrive here. The Army Group Balka did not consider it necessary to draw a new boundary between the positions of the 3rd Hungarian Army and the IV SS Panzer Corps. However, changing the boundaries suggested itself - for what reason this was not done, still remains unclear.

3) Panzer divisions of the SS "Dead Head" and "Viking". were supposed to break through to the Danube, after what do they want

ÿ Due to the fact that the defenders of Budapest used different names for the same objects (the Germans - "Margareten", the Hungarians - "Margit"), the Russian version of this geographical name is given in the text of the book - "Margaret's Island".

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It was necessary to develop an offensive to the north, in the direction of Budapest.

4) The most combat-ready units of the divisions "Dead Head" and "Viking" were supposed to jointly attack the positions of the Soviet tank corps in the areas of Aba, Perkata and Sheregeyesh. This offensive was supposed to end in encirclement and complete destruction of the Soviet tank formation.

5) The motorized infantry of the 1st Panzer Division remained tied to Szekesfehervar. At the same time, the tank units of the 1st division, together with the tanks of the "Dead Head" division, were to continue the offensive along the southern shore of Lake Velence in the direction of the Vali River.

6) In Budapest, preparations were to begin for the capture of the airfield in Budaörs. But this operation was supposed to begin in the final phase of Konrad II, when, according to the Germans, the release of the Hungarian capital would be a problem of several hours. This breakthrough had to be kept strictly secret so that the Soviet command would not have time to take appropriate countermeasures.

At 2230 hours, the operational department of the General Staff of the Ground Forces was notified of this action plan. At the same time, the staff officers of Army Group "South" believed that it was necessary first to destroy the powerful enemy forces located in the space between Perkata and Sheregeyesh, and only after that to develop an offensive to the north. Otherwise, there will be a threat of disruption to the supply of the advancing units. The cleaning of the occupied territories was supposed to be entrusted to the arriving infantry units, since the tank divisions themselves clearly lacked the strength and capabilities for this.

In a telephone conversation with General Wenck, the possibility of transferring the 356th Infantry Division was also considered. At that time, the division was subordinate to the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast (Army Group F). Wenck agreed that in Army Group Balka, the 356th Infantry Division "would be more valuable and appropriate." In addition, the possibility of involving the forces of Army Group F in the Budapest operation was discussed. The fact is that between the two army groups

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("South" and "F") there was a significant free space, which could allow the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal Tolbukhin to regroup and wedged between the two army groups, disrupting communications between them. As history has shown, these fears were not empty words. |

The third day of Operation Konrad III was marked by a slowdown in the advance of the German units. First of all, this was due to the fact that the Germans did not expect such prompt countermeasures from the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. The Soviet counteroffensive was expected, but not so early. In addition, it was assumed that the Soviet units would offer less fierce resistance. In this situation, the Germans could not in any way secure their weakest point - the section of the front stretching from Siofok through Simontornya to Dunapentele. This area was held by only one Hungarian infantry regiment and the reconnaissance battalion of the 3rd Panzer Division. This place itself suggested itself for delivering a powerful Soviet strike. In addition, the experience of Army Group A, which fought in Poland, should have suggested that this is how further events would develop.

January 21, 1945 (Sunday). Fourth day of Operation Konrad P

"As before, a slight frost. In the first half of the day foggy, in some places heavy snowfall. In the second half of the day the weather was clear, sometimes replaced by a slight cloudiness. The position of the roads is unchanged.

On the southern flank of the German offensive, in the area of the Shio Canal, the Soviet troops acted very cautiously. The territories were previously reconnoitered by several tanks and special assault squads. Only after that did the Soviet troops consolidate at the canal crossings. So step by step the Soviet troops moved forward. The German command could not ignore this advance, but the Germans did not have forces in this area to launch at least one more or less effective counterattack. Them

had to be content with

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that the Soviet troops did not go on a decisive offensive. At the same time, the Germans and Hungarians did everything possible to hide the real balance of power in the Shio area. Judging by the mode of action of the Soviet units, Golbukhin expected to meet a powerful group there. As soon as it became clear to the Soviet command that Shio was held by only a Hungarian infantry regiment and one German tank reconnaissance battalion, the southern flank would immediately collapse under the powerful blow of the Red Army units.

At the same time, the Soviet units, surrounded to the south of Lake Velence, managed to avoid complete annihilation at night. But, by the way, this task was too tough for the Germans. The German units located in that area did not have enough forces to instantly cope with this task.

In the triangle bounded by the settlements of Kish-Perkata, Sharoshd and Sheregeyesh, on the night of January 21, units of the XNUMXth tank corps of the enemy tried to break through to the Soviet bridgehead at Dunafeldvar and establish contact with Hercegfalva. Due to the obvious lack of infantry units, it was not possible to create a fortified defensive line anywhere on this sector of the front. The defense in the north and south was carried out by the forces of mobile detachments of the divisions "Viking" and "Totenkopf". The situation favored us, as the Viking division managed to defeat the remnants of the 18th Soviet tank corps and the infantry units that had joined them, which made it possible to continue the offensive in a northerly direction.

The advanced units of the "Dead Head" division passed Adon and began to quickly move north. But in the evening they stopped their movement. The command of the SS Panzer Corps, at the insistence of the headquarters of the army group Balka, decided to withdraw them back in order, firstly, not to increase the gap between the advanced units of the Viking and Totenkopf divisions, and secondly, to eliminate the Soviet grouping. Those

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days in the settlements of Herzegfalva and Scharbogard were surrounded by Soviet detachments, which were powerful enough to strike and disrupt the entire supply system of German tank divisions. In this situation, the German tankers probably regretted more than once that they were not followed by infantry units. Such delays and many other circumstances significantly slowed down the German advance towards Budapest. On the other hand, all this allowed the Soviet troops to create a defensive line in the area of the Vali river. Perhaps, for the Germans, this was the most significant tactical miscalculation. However, at the headquarters of Army Group South, they were only ready to indirectly admit this: "For the further development of the offensive to the northeast of Lake Velence over the next day, we do not have at our disposal a sufficient number of infantry. This forces the advanced tank detachments to go over to the defensive more and more often. In general, it remains unclear how the German command planned to break through to Budapest without significant infantry forces at its disposal. In conditions where there was no continuous front line, but only directions of advance, Soviet detachments operated quite successfully in the rear of German tankers. They did not confine themselves to a deaf defense, but periodically made daring sorties, destroying supply trucks and cutting off communication lines. Under these conditions, it is not surprising that the headquarters did not know where the advanced units were. There was no need to talk about the general picture of the battle. However, the disastrous situation in the German service for the collection and delivery of reports could also be explained by the amazingly large losses among the German signalmen.

As a result, the Viking division spent most of the day trying to take the Soviet units from Aba and Sharoshd into force. At 19 o'clock, the "Vikings" managed to advance to the village of Sabolch, after which the main forces of the SS division rushed in the direction of the settlements of Adon and Ivanchi, where the advanced units of the "Dead Head" division were fighting.

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By that time, the reconnaissance battalion of the "Dead Head" division, which at first advanced towards Vali, was conducting reconnaissance in force in the direction of the villages of St. Peter and Barachka. At that moment the main force. divisions "Dead Head" were located in the town of Kapoynas-Niek. The 1st Panzer Division, which was fighting nearby, on the northern shores of Lake Velence, tried to move to the west in order to dock with the "Dead Head" there. As a result, the Soviet units stationed in the villages of Shuroko and Nadar were attacked from two sides: from the east by the 1st Panzer Division, from the west by the Totenkopf Division. In the end, the detachments of the Red Army lost contact with Szekesfeherar and the outskirts of Budapest, which became a tactical prerequisite for the later capture by the Germans of such an important strategic point as Szekesfeherar. The retreat of the Soviet troops to Szekesfeherar, which could be reached by making a small arc from the northeast, was a signal for the German tankers. They quite justifiably believed that the Red Army men were exhausted, and therefore could not put up fierce resistance for a long time.

By that moment, it became clear that the Soviet command fully realized the danger in which the 4th Guards Army, split in two, found itself. This is evidenced at least by the fact that the 133rd Rifle Corps was transferred to help her, but at the same time, the situation with the supply of ammunition remained catastrophic. The fact is that during the rapid throw of the forward detachments of the "Dead Head", in order to avoid their breakthrough to the other shore, by order of Tolbukhin, the pontoon bridges near Dunapentele and Du were destroyed.

Helmut Becker, commander of the panzer naföldvar. SS division "Totenkopf".

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Despite this circumstance, General Gille of the Waffen-SS ordered the 1st Panzer Division to advance not to the west, but to the north-east in order to capture the vicinity of Vali.

By that time, [U SS Panzer Corps had moved its headquarters to Jeno (a town located 12 kilometers east of Berchida).

In the afternoon, the | th Panzer Division weakened its attack on Szekesfehervar. But the Soviet troops. was not destined to relax. With the onset of darkness, the forces of the 23rd Panzer Division fell upon their positions. At some point, the | th Panzer Division was already south of the city - the tank forces were being regrouped. The division commander, Major General Tunert, with the consent of the command [At the SS Panzer Corps, was to attack Szekesfehervar from the south, inflicting a concentrated attack on Soviet positions in an unexpected place. Among other things, this maneuver significantly reduced the length of the front line that Tunert's division had to hold. Oddly enough, the Germans succeeded in this tactical undertaking.

But at the same time, their situation in the Pilis mountains was far from ideal. The offensive of the 1st cavalry corps on Bichka and Man was postponed for another day. This was done in order to "wait for the weakening of the enemy as a result of their own advance on the segment between the Danube and Velence". General Bulk approved January 22 as the next date for the offensive. Meanwhile, ammunition began to arrive in Budapest. Only on the night of January 21-22, 117 tons of cargo were delivered to the city. As a result, at 7:25 p.m., General Wöhler, in his report to Guderian, assessed the results of that day as "very productive." As a special merit of the advancing units, the failure of the attempt of the 5th Soviet cavalry corps to create a reinforced line of defense was called. But in reality, the general was jumping to conclusions. His report was in no way supported by specific data "from the field." By that time, the only reason for optimism could be given by a radiogram from the SS division "Totenkopf" that its reconnaissance battalion was able to reach the vicinity of the Vali river. But this did not mean at all that this territory had already been taken by the Germans.

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Disappointment awaited Wöhler the next day, when already in another radiogram from Totenkopf it was confirmed that the outskirts of Vali had indeed been reached, but the division not only failed to take the settlement located on its banks, but even penetrated into it. Messages from the Totenkopf Division were scarce and therefore not always clear. But Wöhler preferred not to give up his own assessment of the development of the battle. He decided that the very long-awaited moment had come when [the cavalry corps. In the offensive, he was to be supported by six battalions of motorized infantry, which were reinforced by 40 armored personnel carriers. At the same time, he gave the order to the Hungarian hussars, so that they launched another offensive in the Vertesh mountains. At the same time, the Hungarians were to advance on the Shio canal. It was assumed that the offensive would make it possible to transfer the reconnaissance tank battalion from these places to the north, which was supposed to help the speedy release of Budapest. But somewhere in the depths of his soul, Wöhler understood that all these attempts were doomed to failure, and therefore he asked Guderian for "rapid reaction forces." Guderian promised to provide them on January 25th. As expected at the evening telephone meeting, Wöhler reported to the High Command of the Ground Forces his vision of operational and tactical tasks for the next day:

- 1) The SS divisions Viking and Totenkopf, supported by the strike group of the 1st Panzer Division, were to continue their offensive towards Vali.
- 2) "Dead Head" was supposed to create a defensive line on the approaches to Dunafeldvar, where constantly arriving Soviet units were concentrated.
- 3) The active offensive of the Hungarian units in the area of the Shio Canal was supposed to solve the problem with the supply of units on the front line.
- 4) Szekesfehervar was to be taken in the course of an offensive undertaken in two directions (from the south and west) by units of the 1st and 23rd Panzer Divisions.

5) Depending on the development of the situation near Vali, it was planned to start the offensive of the 1st cavalry corps.

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With all this, the 2nd Panzer Army received an order as soon as possible, "regardless of the risk", to launch an attack on Kaposvár. As it moved forward, the 2nd Panzer Army ran into Bulgarian units for the first time - this was a clear confirmation that the Soviet command was pulling up forces to Shio in order to throw them to the north, hitting the right flank of the advancing German panzer divisions. But at the same time, it was not excluded that fresh units could be thrown into the assault on Budapest.

The end of the offensive, according to Wöhler, was to come a few days later, when "a couple of infantry divisions" would have entered the business. On the issue of receiving infantry divisions, he wanted to rely on Guderian. The same did not reassure Wöhler, saying that their transfer largely depended on the general situation on the Eastern Front. But at the same time, he intended to convince the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast to provide a couple of these divisions. The funny thing about the situation was that Army Group F did not report to the High Command of the Ground Forces, but to its rival, the High Command of the Wehrmacht. That is, Guderian wanted at the same time not to weaken the Eastern Front, and to achieve victory at Balaton at the expense of his "competitors".

But those were just plans. And when they could become a reality, it was completely incomprehensible. In addition, on the northern bank of the Danube, the German command was expecting another "Soviet surprise" - the preparation of the offensive of Pliev's horsemen. Almost at night, General Grolman, in a conversation with General Wenck, could only state: "A crash in the north could cost us the entire battle for Budapest." In order not to be squeezed this time into the Soviet "tongs", the army group Balka was forced to transfer one of its corps to the 8th Army.

January 22, 1945 (Monday). Fifth day of operation "Konrad P"

"Temperature - 6 °C. Cloudy in places, visibility average, and cloudless in places, even clear. The condition of the roads is unchanged".

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The day began with Army Group South Headquarters feeling a huge disappointment about the German advance on the Wahl. Almost open accusations are made against the SS divisions:

"During the first half of the day, it turned out that yesterday's radiograms from the forward detachments of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps that after breaking through the enemy defenses they had reached the outskirts of the village of Val and intended to develop the offensive, as well as morning radiograms that they advancing towards Erchi, Val and Rakerestur, belong only to insignificant reconnaissance groups. Only the reconnaissance battalion of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking" managed to advance into Val northeast of the village of St. Peter and create a defensive line.

But this tactical success could hardly be compared with the expectations that the tanks would already enter Val. The reproaches against the SS tankers were understandable. But, on the other hand, at the headquarters of Army Group South, apparently, they heard only what they wanted to hear. The reports from the Totenkopf Division reported nothing other than the approaching of ordinary reconnaissance groups to the outskirts of the settlement of Val, and not at all powerful reconnaissance tank battalions.

152-millimeter Soviet gun abandoned during the offensive of the M Panzer Corps of the SS near Lake Velence

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Messages during that day were very rare. But even from these rare, fragmentary information, no picture emerged that gives reason for optimism. The SS divisions were not up to the offensive, they could hardly repel the Soviet attacks (in this situation it was generally difficult to say who attacked and who counterattacked). Balk and Wöhler were beside themselves with anger. They went to Gilla at the command post [At the SS Panzer Corps. At the same time, Wöhler himself planned to move the headquarters of Army Group South to Sierz (located 30 kilometers north of Veszprem) in order to be at the location of the advancing units without wasting too much time. He later recalled: "Balk took this intention of mine almost as a personal insult." Before continuing this story, let us consider the general position of the IV SS Panzer Corps in the combat area.

Relative calm reigned in the vicinity of the Shio Canal. The 25th Hungarian Infantry Division gradually brought its regiments here. Only after that did the tank reconnaissance detachment of the 23rd division begin to move towards the Sharviz canal, covering the southern flank of the 3rd tank division.

The main part of the tanks of the 3rd division was thrown back by the Soviet troops from Hercegfalva after the failed German attempt to take this settlement. As a result, the advanced units of the 3rd Panzer Division had to slightly deviate to the northwest. After regrouping, the 3rd Panzer Division launched a new attack on Hercegfalva at around 4 p.m., already from the southwest. At the same time, the second stronghold of the Soviet troops on the southern flank of the operation - the town of Sharbogard - continued its defense. Here, the Red Army detachments managed to clear all the surroundings from German troops. On the Danube Island opposite Dunapentele, a concentration of Soviet troops began, which constantly arrived from the eastern coast. But in Adoni, things were a little worse - the Germans were able to break through to the island adjacent to the coast and knock out the Soviet units from there.

North of Adoni, elements of the SS Viking Division ran into extensive minefields. But this did not prevent the "Vikings" from capturing Ivancha and located a little to the north.

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small railway station. After that, the reinforced reconnaissance tank battalion could not move beyond the Vali River and move far from the village of St. Peter. He was met with heavy Soviet artillery fire. As a result, the Germans had to go on the defensive. The bulk of the tanks of the Viking division could not approach Vali. The bank of the river, occupied by the Germans, was much lower, which gave a significant advantage to the Soviet troops. Soviet artillery perfectly shot through all the surroundings, preventing the Germans from approaching the river. At that moment, the division commander, SS Oberführer Ulrich, miraculously escaped death, lost the car on which the radio transmitter was located. As a result, messages to the headquarters of the army group stopped altogether for some time. The Germans believed that the 509th tank battalion, which was equipped with 70-ton King Tigers, would change the situation in the battle for the Vali River. But this unit failed to break through to the other side. He tried to launch an assault on Barachka, BUT "due to the difficult terrain and the heavy fire of the enemy's anti-tank guns, he was unable to cross to the northeastern coast."

Now none of the German tankers doubted that the Soviet troops had managed to prepare for the defense. There was no question of forcing Vali as soon as possible.

"Royal Tigers" are preparing to break through the Soviet positions

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Meanwhile, the "Dead Head" division again repulsed the Soviet counterattack, during which the Red Army tried to recapture the northern part of Kapolas-Nieka from the Germans. Each time the Soviet counterattacks became stronger and stronger. The Germans had difficulty holding back

not only Soviet tanks, but also Soviet infantry. However, the turning point in the battle for this place has not yet come. In the afternoon, the tankers from the "Dead Head" managed to realize their tactical advantage, and they were able to capture the heights located 2.5 kilometers southeast of this coastal village.

The battles, which not only took a lot of time, but also required great sacrifices, were in no way included in the plans of the German command. Once again, the command of Army Group South was unable to take advantage of its main and, in fact, the only advantage - the surprise of the offensive. The advance of the Germans began to slow down, and the general offensive began to break up into many local battles.

Balk was forced to state that the resistance of the Soviet troops after the arrival of the replenished P guards mechanized corps at the front line increased significantly. He was also forced to admit that he had once again made a mistake (on the eve) by giving a very optimistic assessment of the development of hostilities near the Vali River. In addition, it turned out that the reports from [At the SS Panzer Corps did not at all give rise to such tactical cheerfulness. Therefore, an adjustment of the operation plan was required.

At the headquarters of Army Group South, the following was decided: "Own offensive turned out to be associated with great time costs and huge sacrifices that our units bear, breaking through the enemy defenses ...

Such tactics seem so ineffective that the task of releasing Budapest requires - it will take us to make a new decision.

The Germans clearly did not have enough resources to continue the offensive. The forward detachments covered a distance of approximately 100 kilometers in five days (an average of 20 kilometers a day, which in a different situation would have been a very good result for the Germans). But the limitation in

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Indian resources led to the fact that the divisions were stretched out in a thin line, and were by no means a concentrated tank fist. Breaking through such a line for the Soviet troops was just a matter of time. On top of that, the advanced units were a hundred kilometers away from the rear, where warehouses with ammunition and food were located. The supply of divisions turned into another waste of fuel. But at the same time, one cannot discount the fact that the Germans nevertheless succeeded in breaking through the Soviet defense line in its initial stage.

During Operation Konrad 11, the greatest tactical success for the Germans was the capture of the city of Szekesfehervar by the 1st Panzer Division. By 4 p.m. on January 22, 1945, he was already under the control of the Germans. In this situation, it is impossible not to mention that from a tactical point of view, the decision of the command of the 1st Panzer Division to regroup and strike from the south was absolutely correct. In many ways, this maneuver was reminiscent of the very encirclement of Budapest, when the troops of Marshal Tolbukhin went through the southern borders to the Hungarian capital and in just a few days were able to complete its encirclement. But this clearly did not suit Balka. He reprimanded the command of the division "for illegal actions" and demanded that Gille take action. This was the main difference between the two generals. Gille planned to use the 1st Panzer Division as quickly as possible to relieve the blockade of Budapest. In a situation where units of the Totenkopf Division were actually stuck in local battles, the use of the 1st Panzer Division could lead to the fact that German tanks could still advance towards Budapest. By and large, this was the main task of the army group Balka. If we proceed from the setting of a strategic goal, then the far-sighted command should have focused precisely on achieving it, and not on performing secondary tasks.

But the reaction of Balk, who was so eager to change the situation on the Vali River, led to the opposite effect. Another regrouping only led to a waste of time. From this point on, one could say

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about the failure of Operation Konrad II. Later, after the war, in his memoirs, Balk considers it possible to shift all the blame for the failure of the operation onto the shoulders of Gille. He said that Gille's arbitrariness, despite the huge losses of the Soviet troops, led to a military disaster in Budapest. Speaking of Soviet losses, in his memoirs Balk cites absolutely fantastic figures—it is not known whether the Red Army ever had such forces on the western bank of the Danube.

In any case, after the capture of Szekesfehevar, the headquarters of the army group Balka gave the order to draw a clear boundary between the territory on which it was necessary to operate [At the SS Panzer Corps, and the territory "withdrawing" to the Bright Corps Group (PI Panzer Corps)]. In this situation, everything was tied to the upcoming offensive of the 1st Cavalry Corps. The weak notification and coordination system played a cruel joke on the Germans more than once. This is what happened on January 22. While Balk's army group headquarters believed that the offensive of the 1st Panzer Division should have taken place in the "Budapest", north-east direction, Balk decided that this step was "unpromising". By the evening of January 22, he began to conceive almost a new plan of attack. But the main ones that evening were reproaches against the communication system and Gille's unwillingness to report the location of his units. Balk managed to infect even General Wöhler with such a mood. In a conversation with Guderian, he said: "Today brought us the capture of Szekesfehevar, but did not end with a breakthrough in the area between the Danube and Lake Velence. The reports of the SS Panzer Corps about the breakthrough of individual shock groups turned out to be fake. I sent the captain with a radio station so that he himself would report to me on the progress of the hostilities. In addition, I planned to move the headquarters to Sierz, so as not to spend too much time on long trips. In response, Guderian noted that "the Führer considers it necessary to resolve the situation on the western bank of the Danube with the means at his disposal." "Settlement by available means" actually meant that the battle for a breakthrough was

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to send divisions that had been in constant combat for nearly three weeks. Understanding this, Guderian dropped that he was deciding the issue of assistance with the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast. If we talk about the general condition of the troops of the Warmey group Balka, then by this moment some of the German units were already simply not combat-ready.

Another significant event took place this evening. Marshal Tolbukhin was finally convinced that the tip of the German tank wedge was aimed not to the south, but to the northeast, towards Budapest. In this situation, he abandoned the risky undertaking - the evacuation of part of the Soviet troops to the eastern bank of the Danube. It became clear that the hardest part was over.

That same night, the 356th Infantry Division arrived from Italy at the location of the army group Balka. At first, they planned to send it to the 2nd Panzer Army, which was stationed at the southern end of Lake Balaton, but then it was transferred to the north. Army Group South no longer concealed the fear that Operation Konrad 111 could end in a CAILER.

The calculation of the German mortar fires on Soviet positions near Lake Velence

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Under these conditions, the command [of the SS Panzer Corps received an order with the help of three tank divisions (1st, "Dead Head" and "Viking"), with the support of the 403rd People's Artillery Corps, to start forcing Valya and move northeast to Budapest. Instead of the traditional date and hour of the onset, there was a lengthy phrase: "As soon as possible." After talking with General Bulk, it was decided that this would take place on the morning of 23 January. However, in this situation, time was by no means on the side of the Germans. During the offensive, the cavalry corps managed to capture Man, but at the same time it was counterattacked from the flanks - from Zhambek and Bichke. The forces of the corps were clearly not enough to move any further to the southeast. As a result, he had to regroup. In such circumstances

The command of the [GU of the SS Panzer Corps had to take into account the fact that powerful Soviet flank counterattacks from the vicinity of Bichke were waiting for him. The cavalymen failed to pull over even a part of the Red Army units. On the contrary, by regrouping, they allowed most of the Soviet tank units to turn south to repel the advance of the German tank divisions.

January 23, 1945 (Tuesday). The sixth day of Operation Konrad Pr

"Temperature - 8 °C. It is cloudless, but there is a heavy fog. The condition of the roads is unchanged.

Even at night, it turned out that the regrouping of the GU of the SS Panzer Corps, namely, pulling up the 1st Panzer Division, and especially the artillery, required much more time than had been planned at the headquarters of Balk. At 0430 hours, Major General Gődke reported to the headquarters of Army Group South:

"The GU Panzer Corps of the SS cannot launch the offensive on the morning of January 23, as was originally planned and ordered. The delay caused by the regrouping of the 1st Panzer Division and the People's Artillery Corps may drag on until the evening of January 23rd. Despite this delay

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ku, Commander Balk intends to wait for artillery, since without it there is a risk that the offensive will not succeed at all. In order not to waste time in vain, it was ordered to destroy in the course of small operations individual pockets of enemy resistance. The strike is supposed to be delivered where the enemy has weak positions.

Thus, an error in time calculations was masked. It is significant that this mistake was made not by Gille, but by the command of the army group. But at the same time, Major General Gedke again preferred to lay all the blame on the SS general: "There is an opinion that yesterday's offensive of the 1st Panzer Division in Szekesfehervar, although it led to a favorable outcome, nevertheless significantly slowed down the start of the corps' offensive on northeast".

This is how intrigues were built in the German troops in such an "elegant" way. As it turned out, the capture of Szekesfehervar by the Germans for the army command did not matter! It is doubly remarkable that when Gille proposed to take this city, no one in the headquarters of the army group objected to this intention. No one doubted that the reduction of the northern flank of the Panzer Corps and the subsequent use of the 1st Panzer Division to attack Budapest was a completely logical (from a military point of view) step. And it was no secret to anyone that the "Dead Head" Panzer Division could no longer develop the offensive, moving to the northeast and simultaneously in the opposite direction, along the northern shore of Lake Velence. In this situation, no one remembered that it was precisely such a "two-way" movement of the "Dead Head" division that gave odds to the Soviet troops, who were able to create a powerful line of defense on the bank of the Val in the operational time frame. But from an everyday point of view, everything was extremely clear - the staff officials urgently needed a "scapegoat".

At 0955, Gődke reported to the headquarters of Army Group South that the Hungarian 3rd Army, which was supposed to hold the vicinity of the Shio Canal, had received the command to transfer

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take place along the entire southern flank up to the banks of the Danube. The headquarters of the panzergrenadier division "Feldherrnhalle", most of which was surrounded in Budapest, merged into the "divisional headquarters of Pape". The latter now commanded not only the tank reconnaissance detachments of the 1st and 23rd divisions, but also the 25th Hungarian infantry division. This move was quite predictable, since the Germans did not trust the Hungarian officers.

During the forced downtime, the command of the IV SS Panzer Corps moved its command post from Jenő to Sheregeyesh (that is, the headquarters traveled about 25 kilometers in a day). Now Gilla had to be responsible for the situation on the southeastern flank, on the segment of the front limited by Tsetse and Dunapentele. It was here that the Soviet troops began to manifest themselves most actively. The first Soviet tank counterattack was aimed at Herzegfalva. But the first time the Soviet troops failed to release the detachment of Red Army soldiers surrounded there. By the evening of that day, the front in this sector passed between Alap and Scharbogard, located slightly to the north (where another group of Red Army soldiers continued to hold the defense), several kilometers south of Herzegfalva and along the southern outskirts of Dunapentele. As a result, the 3rd Panzer Division was drawn into the battle on the southeastern flank, and therefore had no opportunity to participate in the breakthrough to Budapest.

Meanwhile, the SS division "Viking" again tried to develop an offensive north along the Danube. Once again at the Valya, the German tanks again came under powerful fire from the Soviet anti-tank artillery, conducted from the opposite, higher bank. Gradually, the Soviet troops began to launch counterattacks. In the area of St. Peter, the Soviet counterattack was unsuccessful, the Germans managed to take advantage of the temporary advantage. On both sides of the narrow-gauge railway line, in the only place they were able to break through to the other side of the Vali. There was a tiny foothold here.

The Germans had very few tactical successes that day. Division "Dead Head" managed to capture the estate

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five kilometers southeast of Kapolnas-Nieka. But the Germans managed to hold it only for a few hours. A Soviet counterattack launched from both sides drove them out. |

While these local battles were going on, the 1st Panzer Division and the 403rd People's Artillery Corps were on the march. As expected, they could only reach their original positions in the evening. As a result, the attack on the Soviet positions near Vali was planned for the night. While these events were unfolding, Bright's corps group on the right wing (23rd Panzer Division) was able to move forward and take up positions on the banks of the Chasashi-Viz river. The positions of the Panzer Division were now located between Zamoy and Lake Velence. But further advance turned out to be impossible - the Soviet line of defense was virtually impregnable. But at the same time, the Soviet defense weakened in the Vertesh mountains. Deciding not to miss such a chance, the German command threw the Hungarian army corps into the mountains of USh. The offensive of the 1st Cavalry Corps, which was developing at that very time, did not bring significant success to the Germans. The Soviet units stationed there at least had combat experience since Operation Konrad 1. As a result, despite the frost, the Soviet soldiers used a special tactic. They dug in tanks up to the very turret, turning them into virtually impregnable firing points. To liquidate such a bunker, the Germans had to equip special detachments at night, and such sorties did not always end in success for them. Many of these "tank bunkers" were under heavy artillery cover. It is worth noting that in January the number of Soviet artillery increased significantly in the northern sector of the front, in particular in the mountains. This was largely due to the fact that the shelling of Buda (the western bridgehead of Budapest) was now carried out mainly from the north and northwest.

At about 10 p.m., General Wöhler traditionally reported to Colonel-General Guderian a report from the battlefield. During the conversation, Guderian interrupted his interlocutor with a rather frank question: "What do you think

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can be done with the forces at your disposal?" Wöhler decided to remain cautious: "This is a very serious matter. After, due to a lack of infantry, the offensive

stalled in several places, we are awaiting the arrival of the 356th Infantry Division. In any case, the forces currently available are insufficient for an offensive. However, I hope that after the arrival of the 356th Infantry Division and the development of the offensive in the Vertesh mountains, the front will level out and we will be able to continue the offensive."

Thinking, Guderian said: "In the last resort, we will have to throw more parts here that were intended for other purposes. This is too serious a matter to be attempted by a less powerful infantry division. The Führer wants to completely stabilize the Danube front."

By that moment, it was clear as daylight that the Germans for the successful continuation of the offensive was clearly not enough for one infantry division. At the headquarters of Army Group South, dissatisfied voices were heard more and more often about this. But this characterized the German style of command, which by the end of the war was reduced to attempts to avoid extremely clear decisions. Gödke, who gave an evasive answer, was a prime example of this style of command. In general, he preferred to speak in certain conventions: "Now, if tonight [At the tank corps we manage to develop an offensive across the river, and the front line in the Vertesh mountains is straightened, then perhaps we will manage on our own." A chuckling Guderian replied, "Well, then we'll talk about it tomorrow at [0000 am."

What, in fact, the command of Army Group South was counting on, what success, remains unclear. If the offensive of the 1st cavalry corps, then even Balk admitted that miracles do not happen. Yes, it was originally planned that the German cavalymen would be able to move forward only in case of a successful offensive [At the SS Panzer Corps. But the situation dictated other conditions, Now the cavalymen could somehow develop the advance

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forward only in the conditions of a tank offensive, which has not yet begun.

At 10:55 p.m., Balk was forced to admit that the entire operation, in its current state, was doomed to failure. At the same time, he asked the headquarters of the Army Group "South" that the High Command of the Ground Forces send at least two or three brigades of assault guns (self-propelled artillery installations), "which must be put into operation near Gran not to give the enemy Karl Ulrich, tank commander, a moment's rest." "It is possible for the SS Viking Division to assume that driving the enemy out of the Vertesh Mountains would be a significant loss for us, since these troops would go on the offensive in more convenient places. By means of many attacks, one must again and again look for weak points in the enemy. Tomorrow at 10 o'clock the headquarters of the army group will report what we specifically need, but the 356th Infantry Division is simply irreplaceable for us. These words were immediately conveyed to the High Command. The result of the conversation was Guderian's decision to transfer the troops of the army group Balka, located on the northern bank of the Danube, under the command of the headquarters of the 8th Army. Now the natural frontier between the German armies ran along the great European river.

That same night, during a conversation with the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast, it was found out that Army Group F was ready to provide at least four divisions, so that they would be in close cooperation with the 2nd Panzer Army (but not in subordination to it)) struck at the Soviet troops in southern Hungary. The approximate start date for this operation was February 6, 1945. Such a development of events did not suit either Guderian or Army Group South. IN
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The 2nd Panzer Army was generally told that on January 26 they planned an attack on Kaposvár.

All these discussions were put to an end by an order from Hitler that arrived literally at night. It not only forbade operational command, but also significantly limited the freedom of action in

purely tactical operations. Now even a minor military operation required special permission from the Fuhrer. Hitler returned more and more in his thoughts to the ideas and categories of the First World War. As the German position became more hopeless, Hitler increasingly sought psychological refuge in orders "hard as steel." But he could not fix anything, only made the hopeless situation on the fronts even more hopeless.

January 24, 1945 (Wednesday). The seventh day of operation "Konrad P" -

"Temperature - 5" C. Cloudy, heavy snowfall. Roads are partially or completely broken. You can only drive on major highways.

In the morning, the German command realized that they were in a trap. The Soviet troops were able in the shortest possible time to create a powerful defensive line not only in the south (between Balaton and the Danube), but also in the north (between Lake Velence and the Danube). German air reconnaissance reported that large Soviet military formations were approaching these deeply echeloned defensive lines, which German divisions could not break through from two sides (respectively, from the south and from the north). You didn't have to be a strategist to understand that Marshal Tolbukhin was preparing a major strategic counteroffensive. The beginning of the Soviet counter-offensive was laid - the village of Szentmiklos, located just south of Scharbogard, was recaptured by the Soviet troops. This was followed by Soviet attacks in the area of Dunapentele. However, at first the Germans managed to beat them off. In this direction, the SS Panzer Divisions could have launched a counterattack (the Soviet defenses there were not very strong), but it was at this moment that the IV SS Panzer Corps undertook

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an active attack on Soviet positions along the banks of the Val. In the course of a massive tank attack, the German divisions, concentrating all their power on one small segment of the front, managed to break through the Soviet defense line in a section 20 kilometers wide (from the mouth of the Valya, which flows into the Danube, to Barachka). But even this breakthrough did not mean a tactical victory - the Soviet troops, as before, continued to resist fiercely.

The greatest success during this German offensive was achieved by the SS Panzer Division "Viking". Despite the unfavorable landscape and the Soviet defenses, the "Vikings" went deep into the positions of the Red Army in a section a couple of kilometers wide, about a kilometer. It happened just east of St. Peter. During this thrust, units of the 5th SS Panzer Division managed to capture two bridges across the Vali intact. In other conditions, this would be a guarantee of tactical success, since in this place the Germans could form a good base for further development of the offensive. But by January 24, the IV SS Panzer Corps did not have not only reserves, but even their own forces, so that they could hastily continue the offensive. Gille just followed the order, realizing all its senselessness. As a result, barely having time to cross the Vali, the German tank units came under the crossfire of Soviet artillery. Anti-tank guns fired from the nearest positions, and heavy Soviet artillery fired from the opposite bank of the Danube.

The division "Dead Head" was able to penetrate into the southern part of Barachka during stubborn battles. Here, the German tankers, virtually deprived of infantry support, found themselves drawn into street battles that were dangerous for them. Afraid to leave most of the tanks on the streets of this settlement, the command of the "Dead Head" gave the order to retreat.

During this offensive, the 1st Panzer Division had the hardest time. Near the village of Pattend, German tanks ran into anti-tank barriers. Almost immediately, from the flanks, Soviet troops inflicted a swift

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hit. Nor did the 23rd Panzer Division manage to achieve any significant tactical success, which could not even break through the defensive line of the Red Army, located north of Lake Velence, even a few meters.

The 1st Cavalry Corps during its offensive was able to achieve only minor local successes. Having begun to advance in the area of the settlement of Man, he finally got bogged down in protracted battles on this sector of the front. The Soviet troops clung to the frozen ground with their teeth, not retreating a meter beyond the Bichke-Zhambek line. During the day, the Red Army launched several successful counterattacks. Moreover, now the task of the Soviet troops was much simplified. With massive air and artillery support, units of the Red Army tried to penetrate into Buda from the north and northwest. The concentration of troops in this area made it possible not only to gradually move deep into the western bridgehead of Budapest, but also to successfully repel all the attacks of the German cavalry.

That day there were several staff movements. General Wöhler, as stated earlier, moved to a new command post in Sierz, from where he went to the headquarters [At the SS Panzer Corps, where General Balk showed up "accidentally" (as noted in the combat diary). Not finding Gille in place, they immediately arranged an operational meeting regarding the further development of the offensive. The results of this discussion were reflected in the war diary:

"Since the experience currently available shows that a frontal offensive on the front near Valya cannot lead to the defeat of the enemy, who created a defense line in depth and concentrated significant forces that pose a real threat to our flanks, it was a decision was made to strike in the direction of Budapest with units [Near the SS Panzer Corps from the territory located north-west of Lake Velence. To do this, the tank corps must make a U-turn in the area between Vali and Velence, so that in cooperation with the forward units of the III tank corps (4th

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cavalry brigade and the 2nd Hungarian tank division) and with the active participation of the Hungarian army corps located in the Vertesh mountains, destroy the enemy forces east of the river. Wali. After eliminating the danger of enemy flank attacks in the area of the river. Wali, the offensive must again continue in a northeasterly direction."

Intending to leave the headquarters of the tank corps, Balk met Gille on the way back and gave him the order to strike in a north-western direction along the Vali River. The offensive was to begin at night, mainly by tank units. The main goal of this tactical offensive operation was to be the elimination of the frontal arc that arose to the north of Lake Velence, as well as the elimination of the threat of flank attacks by Soviet troops.

The headquarters of Army Group "South" agreed with this intention, but at the same time suggested that it would be necessary to stop the offensive | cavalry corps southeast of the village of Man, as it did not bode well for any tactical success. At the same time, the regrouping of units of the 6th Panzer Division was envisaged, which was supposed to lead to support for the offensive of the Hungarian army corps in the Vertesh mountains. Balk expressed the desire to wait for a more suitable time, since "the forces of the Soviet Guards Mechanized Corps, which was intended to fight against the [SS Utank Corps," were released.

In this situation, the command of the Army Group "South" imposed a ban on the diversion operation "Icebreaker" planned for January 25, 1945, when two divisions were to attack Soviet positions from the southern end of Lake Balaton. Most likely, this was due to the fact that Army Group F was not ready until the beginning of February to provide its own forces for this operation. As we remember, this operation was originally planned for the 2nd

tank army on 26 January. However, at the insistence of the High Command of the Ground Forces
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rescheduled a day earlier, to January 25. But the day before it began, conditions and circumstances changed. The 2nd Panzer Army did everything possible to influence the High Command through the headquarters of Army Group South: "The order to cancel the offensive operation will be very badly reflected on divisions that are urgently put on alert." But everything was useless. No arguments and persuasion had no effect. Hitler was more important and more weighty than all the above arguments. Strange as it may sound, but in this situation he worked exclusively for Marshal Tolbukhin, who was very afraid of such a flank offensive by German troops. At 2130 hours, General Wenck reported to Army Group South that "the Führer is ready to bring the 2nd Panzer Army into battle only if [the Wu Panzer Corps succeeds in its offensive." Although from a tactical point of view, everything should have been the other way around: the 2nd Panzer Army had to pull back part of the Soviet troops, so that the SS Panzer Corps could still break through to Budapest. Further, General Wenck continued: "If the offensive of the Main SS Panzer Corps, as, in fact, now, will slip, then the enemy will be able to throw too large forces on the 2nd Panzer Army. So, at least, the Fuhrer thinks.

In response to an attempt to influence the decision made ("the units are already ready to attack") in | one hour 30 minutes (already January 25) a message arrived that "the offensive can only begin on a special command."

As a result, Army Group South received the exact opposite of what was originally planned at its headquarters: they did not want to put up with postponing the offensive operation of the 2nd Panzer Army even for one day, but in the end it was postponed for a longer , in fact, an indefinite period. Not only was the notorious effect of surprise lost, since the Soviet troops received a significant respite, during which they could regroup and move the epicenter to the Shio canal, from where the Red Army units could hit the German tank units fighting between the Danube from the south. and the river Vali. But Hitler did not want to hear anything. At the group's headquarters

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armies were forced to take this information into account and put up with it.

On the eve of these events, at 11 am (and not 10 am, as promised), General Balk informed the General Staff of the Ground Forces that, in addition to the 356th Infantry Division, he was also "in dire need of assault guns." To Guderian's question "How will they be used?" the headquarters of the army group Balka put forward the following plan:

"y | -th turn: removal of obstacles from near Budapest;

- 2nd stage: removal of obstacles from the area in front of the positions of the 2nd Panzer Army;
- 3rd line: Settlement of the situation east of the Gran - this "would be a prerequisite for gaining full control over the western bank of the Danube before the enemy could establish a defense system near the Shio Canal."

But such an assessment of the situation turned out to be fundamentally wrong, since the Soviet troops near Shio were preparing for an offensive, and not for defense.

It is significant that in his plans Balk actually assumed the functions of commander of Army Group South. This could mean that by that time he had gone far beyond the commander of an army group in his competence. As you can see, in the second stage he planned actions in connection with the 2nd Panzer Army, and in the third stage - in connection with the 8th Army, which was the task of the commander of Army Group South, but not Balk! We have noted this moment

to show how obstinately Balk interfered in the affairs of the higher command, actively influencing the commander of the army group, General Wöhler, and not only on him. It is for this reason that the army group Balka (its actions and plans) received much more attention than its neighbors, the 2nd Panzer and 8th armies, in the journal of operations of Army Group South. The disproportion remains obvious, even if we take into account the fact that the bulk of the fighting was carried out by the Balk group. However, for our story

this is a positive thing, because

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It makes it easier to understand how Balk thought and what motivated him. This will make it possible to better see the contradictions that existed on this sector of the front. It is thanks to these records that one can see how, at first, the unbiased attitude of the command of the Army Group "South" towards Gille and the headquarters of the 1st SS Panzer Corps was replaced by distrust, and then resulted in outright antipathy.

But back to headquarters. At first, Guderian gave permission to move the epicenter of the offensive of the 1st SS Panzer Corps in a northwesterly direction. But later during the conversation, he proposed a new plan, the possibility of which General Wenck had already hinted at earlier: "If the advance in the northwest is not successful, then the 1st SS Panzer Corps should regroup and advance towards the Zamoya area."

Apparently, this was Hitler's idea, because an hour later, at 9:30 pm, General Wenck once again drew the attention of the Chief of Staff of Army Group South to the fact that "the Führer is waiting for a timely decision on the regrouping [1st SS Panzer Corps, but only if the offensive in the northwest direction is not successful." Wenck continued: "According to the idea of the Führer, the 1st Panzer Division and the People's Artillery Corps should be left on the banks of the Valya, and the SS Panzer Divisions should regroup in the Zamoya area."

General Wöhler immediately informed General Balk of this decision and demanded that he immediately take the necessary measures. In response, Balk self-confidently declared (it was at 22 o'clock then!): "The offensive in the north-western direction has probably already begun."

It goes without saying that General Gille of the Waffen-SS wanted to use the bridgehead organized by units of the SS Panzer Division Wiking to develop a further offensive. It remains unclear why General Balk did not take into account the bridgehead on the "Soviet" bank of the Vali River, especially considering that this bank was much higher, and therefore, the regrouping of German divisions had to take place literally in front of the Soviet

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soldiers and officers. They could easily understand that the attack of the panzer divisions would soon be delivered elsewhere. Later, Balk seemed to justify himself: "If the advancing units had made their way to the town of Val (about 15 kilometers northwest of Barachka), then there would have been the possibility of a "small decision" when [the SS Panzer Corps could closely cooperate with the PI tank corps advancing from Zamoy. In this case, we still had a chance of success."

The most ungrateful role in this situation was assigned to Gille, he was again forced to explain to his officers why, having suffered heavy losses, it was necessary to change the direction of the offensive again, while again moving away from Budapest, which, in fact, was the main goal of the whole operation. Gille, of course, did not know about the strategic undertakings of Hitler and Guderian, but he saw that all the ridiculous orders came to him from the headquarters of the Balka army group. And therefore, he considered General Balk to be the author of these commands. Balk himself considered it below his dignity to inform Gille about all the intricacies of the strategic "games" that were going on in Hitler's Headquarters.

January 25, 1945 (Thursday). Eighth day of operation "Konrad III"

"Light cold. Strong cloud cover. Heavy snowfall in places. The condition of the roads where the snow fell is very bad."

On the southern flank of the battle, near the Shio Canal, as well as on the segment between the settlements of Simontornja and Dunaföldvár, the Soviet counteroffensive was gradually unfolding. At first, reconnaissance companies entered the business, followed by the shock battalions of the Red Army. A springboard was being prepared for a powerful strike in a northerly direction, that is, to the rear [At the SS Panzer Corps. Units of the 3rd Hungarian Army, the 3rd Panzer Division and the reconnaissance battalion of the 23rd Panzer Division could hardly hold back the Soviet onslaught.

On this day, in the messages coming from the IV SS Panzer Corps, in fact, the "Dead Head" division was never mentioned. It also remained unclear whether

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whether the 3rd Hungarian Army would advance to the Danube, where it was to close positions with the 3rd Panzer Division. On that day, there was complete chaos at the front. The headquarters of the army group Balka had no idea what was really going on in the south. However, it was clear to almost everyone that it was here that fierce battles were to begin.

As a consequence, the command post P of the Hungarian army corps was moved from Aiki to the Bakony forest, on the northern shore of Lake Balaton, to a place called Balatonfüred. In this regard, it became unclear where the border between the positions of the [GU of the SS Panzer Corps and the 3rd Hungarian Army. The headquarters of the army group Balka also did not ask this question. At the same time, the Soviet troops launched a counterattack in the region of the Vali River, first of all, they tried to eliminate the German bridgehead on the northern bank of the river. All day long, this small area, held by the Vikings, was subjected to active artillery and mortar fire.

Despite the fact that on that day nothing was reported about the "Dead Head" division, this did not mean at all that it did not take part in the battles. Tankers from the 3rd SS Panzer Division, together with units of the 1st Panzer Division (mainly with the 113th Panzergrenadier Regiment), fought near Barachka. They never succeeded in capturing this settlement. During the next Soviet counterattack, the Germans were driven out from the southwestern outskirts of Barachka. And after another Soviet counterattack, all the crossings across the Vali River ended up in the hands of the Red Army.

Let us shift our attention to the sector of the front located somewhat to the south-west. Here, the forces of the 1st Panzer Division (1st Panzergrenadier Regiment, supported by the SS Norge Battalion) captured the village of Pettend during a bloody battle. The fierceness of this battle is evidenced by the fact that 17 tanks were hit during it.

At about the same time [ShP Panzer Corps was able to advance somewhat east of Szekesfehervar. As a result, a ledge appeared, deepening into Soviet positions.

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in the region of the Vertes mountains. But despite this advance, Bright's corps group failed to close their positions with the left wing of the IV SS Panzer Corps. According to the plans of the command, it was assumed that this would happen on the northern shore of Lake Velence near Kapol nas Niek.

The 1st Cavalry Corps unsuccessfully tried to repel the Soviet counterattacks, which were launched from two sides in the area of the settlement of Man.

In Budapest, the number of wounded Germans and Hungarians reached 10 thousand people. Air supply stopped again. The Luftwaffe's own forces could not even strike at

Soviet positions. This was hindered not so much by bad weather as by the Soviet fighters dominating the sky over Budapest.

The Soviet troops were able to withstand the German attack, and now the defense line began not only to stabilize, but also to strengthen with every passing hour. Any attempt by the Germans to attack the Soviet positions, the Red Army responded with an equally strong counterattack. It became clear that the battle was about to turn. Only at the headquarters of the army group Balka they shrugged their shoulders and embarrassedly reported to the headquarters of Army Group South that "for unknown reasons, the advance of the launchers of the SS Panzer Corps in the north-western direction was slowed down." However, the reasons for this were clear and even obvious.

If you look at this picture from the German side, then there are several such reasons. Firstly, the bulk of the German panzer divisions were involved in protracted battles near the Vali River. Secondly, it was very difficult to regroup troops in the face of ever-increasing Soviet counterattacks. In order not to suffer huge losses, the Germans could carry it out only after dark. As a result, the delay was inevitable. To all this, one can add a complex landscape, constant raids by Soviet attack aircraft, roads that looked more like swamps. Thirdly, the most significant problem for [U of the SS Panzer Corps was the supply. Not only food

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but the ammunition was delivered to the front line with a huge delay. Gille reported this to everyone: both to the headquarters of Balk and to the headquarters of Army Group South. But the headquarters preferred not to react to these reports in any way.

On that day, General Wöhler went to Sheregeyesh to the command post to Gilla to discuss the further course of the operation. It is noteworthy that at that moment the command of the army group was more worried about the situation on the southern flank of the battle. This was also reflected in the combat log:

"On the southern wing of the army group Balka, the enemy is preparing a counteroffensive aimed at the area between the Danube and the Sharviz canal. On the sector of the front from Budapest to the positions of the 2nd Panzer Army, he concentrated from 5 to 7 rifle divisions. They are drawn to the bridgehead near Dunaföldvár. To the south, the assault units of the XNUMXth tank corps were concentrated, which received new Sherman tanks. On the eastern bank of the Danube, positions are occupied by the UP Guards Mechanized Corps, which at any moment can be transferred to the bridgehead. In order not to weaken the offensive in the northern direction, the command of the army group can send only the 3rd Panzer Division to the southern flank.

In the morning, at about 8 o'clock, General Wöhler arrived at Gille. During the discussion, disagreements emerged between them as to how to proceed. The dispute almost ended in a scandal. The case concerned the 1st Panzer Division. In the combat log, these events were reflected in the following way:

"The subject of discussion was the planned offensive to the northwest, between the Vali River and Lake Velence. SS-Obergruppenfuehrer Gille informed the Army Group Commander that he had refused yesterday at 15:30 to give the order to the 1st Panzer Division. This was done, according to him, because he perceived the incoming message not as an order, but only as a possible intention. In addition, the forces of the 1st Panzer Division were used to take Pettend. Co.

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the commanding officer replied that the 1st Panzer Division should achieve tactical success during that day. Without the capture of Pettend, any development of the offensive in the north-western direction was impossible. Gille himself must strictly adhere to the plan developed in

army group headquarters. The commander told SS-Obergruppenführer Gille that he must ask himself whether he should advance in the same order in the old direction, or, after regrouping, link up with the 3rd Panzer Corps. It was noted that under the prevailing conditions any regrouping was an inevitable evil, but in this situation it was necessary, first of all, to reckon with the order of the Führer."

At the same time, the headquarters of the Army Group Balka reported to Army Group South that [U SS Panzer Corps did not launch an offensive to the northwest due to significant supply difficulties. However, Wöhler knew about this from Gille, as they say, "firsthand." At 10:35, the headquarters of the army group Balka reported that "the commander of the army group arrived at the location [At the SS Panzer Corps, to force the order to carry out the attack to the northwest."

What is interesting about this story is that the enormous difficulties faced by Gille's divisions were simply ignored. And his very behavior was interpreted solely as a refusal to comply with the given order. But General Wöhler himself made somewhat different accents during the morning meeting, which was reflected in the combat log. Balk clearly escalated the situation, wanting to "make extreme" Gille, who he did not like.

And one more interesting point. At 1055 hours, Lieutenant General Grolman informed General Wenck that "the GU Panzer Corps of the SS had not yet started the offensive due to significant supply difficulties." And then the main attention was again paid to the southern flank, which more and more often became known as the "southern bridgehead". It was reported: "The enemy continues to pull up forces to the southern flank of the Balka army group to the bridgehead near Dunaföldvár. This time from the eastern foothold in Budapest

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they were thrown over another rifle corps. In addition, reconnaissance revealed that the 61st Guards Rifle Division had appeared in positions in front of the 2nd Tank Army. An interesting fact is that Balk himself spoke of other forces and gave a different picture of the location of the Soviet troops.

It is difficult to establish when Bulk arrived at Gilla that day. It is known that at 10:30 Balk left his headquarters. To get to the command post to Gilla, he had to pass through Kishber, Mor, Szekesfehervar, that is, to travel at least 100 kilometers. Under those conditions, it would take 3-4 hours. If he had chosen the route through Zirtz and Warpalota, it would have taken even longer. That is, in the best case, he could be at Gille only at 14:30. At this time, General Wöhler was again going to the SS general. It is unlikely that he was able to meet Bulk along the way. It is only known that at 4 p.m. Gille again called the headquarters of Army Group South and asked for clear explanations about what he should do. A separate request was the removal of internally contradictory orders that Balk gave:

"I received an order from Balk to launch an offensive towards Vali, in cooperation with the II Panzer Corps, where on the western flank I should break through the Soviet defenses. But this is a completely different order than I received from the commander of the army group. Orders change almost every day. As a result, neither in the Shtankov Corps, nor in our tank corps, I can figure out in what direction to attack. In this regard, the question arises, should we liberate the western part of Vali or still break through to Budapest? We have neither the strength nor the ability to carry out such conflicting orders so quickly. We have 300 casualties every day."

For the first time in nearly four weeks of unsuccessful offensives, a Waffen-SS general spoke of casualties.

Lieutenant General Grolman was quite concerned about what Gille had told him. At least as soon as at 1635 hours the commander of the army group was in his

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headquarters, he immediately called Balk's headquarters to inquire about further developments. In response, Major General Gedke reported that "The SS Panzer Corps was ordered to stop the attack on Vali and use all available forces, with the exception of those that would hold the defense on the southern bank of the river, so that together with units of the Shtankovy corps to attack Acha. As if making excuses, Gődke said: "The destruction of the Soviet forces north of Lake Velence is, by design, only the "first act", after which an offensive will follow in the already familiar northeast direction." Again, it is significant that Gille knew nothing about the fact that this offensive was only a "first act", and even more so did not hear anything about the fact that he was to subsequently fight his way back to Budapest. Grolman immediately did not fail to express his dissatisfaction: "No one gave the order to break through again in the northeast direction. However, this is in line with the intentions of the command of the army group. In response to this, the headquarters [The tank corps was assured that by the evening they could finish preparations for launching an offensive to the northwest and be able to move out of the vicinity of Pettend in the direction of Acha (this settlement was located 12 kilometers southeast of Chakvar) . The attack was supposed to start at nightfall. But Gille made a reservation that by that time the corps had only 50 tanks ready for use. The rest took time to repair.

By this time, the 4th Cavalry Brigade, the armored group of the 6th Panzer Division and individual units of the 23rd Panzer Division were supposed to go on the offensive from the vicinity of Zamoy. They were supposed to rush east to the same point - Ache. The German command intended to surround and completely destroy the Soviet troops stationed here by strikes from two sides, thereby gaining full control over the territories to the north of Lake Velence. |

At the same time, it was planned to strike from the town of Sar with the forces of the 6th Panzer Division and the Cavalry Corps. These German units were to move along the Vali River in a southeasterly direction, towards ýU

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SS Panzer Corps. However, Balk preferred to abandon this venture: "The proposed use of the 6th Panzer Division in the Vertesh mountains near Sar, given the difficult terrain, seems unreasonable."

However, in fairness, let's say that at that moment, taking into account the strength of the Army Group "South" and the forces of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which could count on the reserves of the 2nd Ukrainian Front, the release of Budapest was not only unrealistic, but and at all a fantastic task. Moreover, part of the tank divisions had to be left on the banks of the Vali in order to provide defense. Even with the most optimistic estimates, the Germans could hardly count on victory.

By this point, the headquarters of Army Group South was in a state of panic. At 7:50 p.m., Balk spoke on the telephone with General Wöhler, and both agreed unanimously that it was time to prepare for defense. Assessing the strength of the Soviet troops that had accumulated on the bridgehead near Dunaföldvár, they did not see a single opportunity to stop the coming counteroffensive of the Red Army.

In Budapest, the encircled German-Hungarian group was starving with might and main. Not a single ton of cargo was delivered to them that day. Balk tried to correct the situation, but the weather was non-flying. As a result, Balk took out all his dissatisfaction on the allegedly "obstinate" Gill, who of all the senior officers on this sector of the front was, perhaps, the only one who tried to fulfill the task assigned to him - to unblock Budapest.

January 26, 1945 (Friday). The ninth day of operation "Konrad III"

"Thaw, strong wind, snowfall and rain. Roads covered with slippery ice are instantly covered with snow. They are almost impassable."

Parts of the 3rd Panzer Division in the south with difficulty held back the counterattacks of the Soviet troops, which were constantly launched along the entire front from the Sharviz canal, Herzegfalva and Nagyvenyim to Dunapentele. Trying to switch to retaliatory attacks, the Germans found themselves in a very difficult position

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nie, as they ran into vast Soviet minefields. Attempts by reconnaissance groups from the P Hungarian army corps to cross from the northern shore of Lake Balaton to the southern were unsuccessful.

The command of the IV SS Panzer Corps turned out to be relieved of the need to deal with the supply of the 3rd Panzer Division fighting on the "southern bridgehead". The headquarters of the Army Group Balka drew new boundaries between the positions of the 3rd Hungarian Army and [At the SS Panzer Corps. It passed along the line Sharoshd - Perkata - Makad - the southern end of the island of Csepel. This did not make Gille's task any easier, since now, among other things, he had to not only advance to the northwest, but also to maintain a defensive line almost 40 kilometers long in the south.

This task was entrusted to the Viking division, most of which fought on Vali. Here, the Soviet troops launched another counterattack, knocking out the Germans from the bridgehead near the village of St. Peter and significantly pushing them near Barachka. For the Germans, the situation was saved by the offensive north of Velenets, when at night the units of the Panzer Corps managed to break far ahead to Val and the northern outskirts of Vereb. In the east, SS divisions were able to advance as far as Pazmand. One of the advance detachments of the Germans was even able to create a bridgehead in the area of the village of Kayasto-St. Peter (not to be confused with the village of St. Peter, located to the south). However, this bridgehead turned out to be short-lived - in the afternoon it was recaptured by Soviet troops during a swift attack. In those hours, even the slightest tactical successes of the Germans were tried to be recorded in the war diary: "Moving to the west and south-west, both tank groups united and in the first half of the day were able to reach areas just north of Vereb. By that time, the Panzergrenadiers were able to take Vereb. Powerful enemy counterattacks were repulsed here by the fire of ten tanks. At night, units of the 1st Panzer Division took Pazmand, but during the enemy counterattack it was repulsed. During a new offensive south of Pazmand, two enemy tanks were destroyed.

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However, even from these lines it is clear that the Germans had nothing to boast of. By evening, it became completely clear that they had not been able to make any significant progress.

A little to the north, at the positions of the 3rd Panzer Corps, the "SS battle group Ney", consisting of Hungarians, was launched into battle. Almost immediately, they were drawn into a protracted battle that took place in the territory of the vineyards growing east of Szekesfehervar. The Hungarian SS immediately began to suffer huge losses. No greater success was expected by the assault groups, composed of units of the 23rd Panzer Division and the 4th Cavalry Brigade. Having started their offensive, they immediately came under fire from the flanks of the Soviet units. As a result, this group managed to advance only 100 meters.

In the Verteš mountains, heavy snowfall and rain significantly slowed down the regrouping of the Hungarian army corps. The progress [of the cavalry corps was so insignificant that Balk, not hiding his emotions, burst into abuse of his commander.

In a summary that General Balk presented to the headquarters of Army Group South, he outlined a new version of why [At the SS Panzer Corps it was necessary to advance precisely to the west:

"We must be careful to destroy the enemy one by one, since any careless action in the north-east direction towards Budapest will be used by the guards motorized corps, located on the banks of the Vali, ready to repel the attack. Before noon, it was necessary to establish contact with the forward detachments near Zamoy, bypassing the positions of the II Guards Mechanized Corps. If this succeeded, then the 23rd Panzer Division, located north of Szekesfehervar, could be used, depending on the situation, either for a breakthrough to Budapest, or for use in the southern bridgehead.

In all this "beautiful plan" there was one snag - the advanced units at Zamoy, which were supposed to form one of the teeth of the "pincers", did not succeed in the offensive.

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As a result, the divisions [At the SS Panzer Corps would have to overcome 25 kilometers from Vereb to Zamoy in fierce fighting. To have time to do this by the second half of the day was a utopia, at least from a temporary point of view.

To what extent such a view was shared at the headquarters of Army Group South was of no importance, since at 1040 hours the phone rang from the High Command of the Ground Forces. It was reported that "at the moment a Western solution is the only possible one". But in practice, not everything turned out to be as smooth as General Balk said. There was no need to even ask why. The 1st Panzer Corps, or rather the 1st Panzer Division and the Totenkopf Division, could not move forward quickly, as they constantly had to repel the flank counterattacks of the Soviet troops. By evening, it became clear that even by nightfall they would not reach their goal.

At 1850 hours, the Chief of Staff of Army Group Balka notified the command of Army Group South:

"The commander of the army group lingered at the command post of the IV SS Panzer Corps. He is of the opinion that the prescribed advance to the northwest that night was carried out successfully. However, during the forced turn to the west, some organizational difficulties arose. In the IV SS Panzer Corps, they intended to regroup, taking into account the direction of the new offensive. The transition from the snow-covered railway line Lovashberen - Acha was not an easy task.

Indeed, it was constantly snowing. Out of nowhere, snowdrifts a meter high appeared, which caused difficulties for both fighting sides. But the Germans suffered the most from them, as they finally lost their supply of provisions and ammunition. However, this once again did not bother General Bulk. He again attacked the command of the IV Panzer Corps with angry criticism.

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Correct from a tactical point of view, the decision of the command of the SS division. The "dead head" - to assign a tank reconnaissance battalion for flank cover, placing it in the area of the village of Caiasto St. Peter - was subjected to universal censure. It seemed to Balk that the offensive was developing too slowly, and therefore he continued to "tear and throw":

"At 9:15 pm, the commander of the army group Balk notified the commander of the army group South that the GU Panzer Corps of the SS still had not advanced west. Under these conditions, it would make sense to start the offensive as early as 23:00. The SS Panzer Corps delayed the advance from the Pettend area for 36 hours. When today before noon the offensive could lead to success, the corps did not even budge. Instead, the strike units of the "Totenkopf" division continued in vain to hold a bridgehead near the village of Caiasto St. Peter, although they were not ordered to do so. As a result, the bridgehead created by the reconnaissance battalion of the SS Panzer Division "Dead Head" was lost. To justify the delay in the offensive to the west, the command [At the tank corps indicated that it was holding back enemy

tanks. Indeed, 15 wrecked enemy tanks were discovered, but this does not justify postponing the offensive, since the same tanks could have been destroyed by invading enemy positions. In response to this, the Commander-in-Chief of Army Group South would like to discuss this issue with Colonel General Guderian. In the meantime, direct command of the SS Panzer Corps should be transferred to the commander of the army group, General Balk.

It is hardly worth commenting on this post. One can only add that the "Dead Head" could not hold the bridgehead mentioned above, since the preponderance of forces in this case was clearly on the Soviet side. Gille could not, and did not intend to, fight Balk's intrigues. For the most part, he didn't even know about them. He had no idea that something bad was going on behind his back. But in the end, the constant reproaches that Balk made had their effect on

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Command of Army Group "South": "In today's conversation with Colonel General Guderian, the Commander of Army Group "South" reported on the command of the Main Directorate of the SS Panzer Corps. In response, Guderian announced that he would prepare an audit of the activities of the command [At the SS Panzer Corps].

In this case, for Balk, everything was complicated by the fact that Guderian was personally acquainted with Gille and had his own opinion about him, which Balk and Wöhler could hardly have influenced. Looking ahead, we can say that the notorious "test", which Balk so sought, did not give anything; both Gille and the officers close to him remained at their posts. An attempt to make them "scapegoats" for the fact that Budapest was taken by the Soviet troops failed.

Meanwhile, the battle in Budapest began to enter its final stage. The number of wounded Germans and Hungarians reached 11 thousand people. The morale of the encircled group was finally undermined. In the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces itself, they no longer counted on the fact that it would be possible to break through to the city at all, not to mention recapturing it back from the Soviet troops. Perhaps this partly explains why Gille, with the stubbornness of a fanatic, still wanted to break through to the Hungarian capital. He noted in the war diary:

"In the course of today's offensive, the idea is confirmed that even with the capture of Szekesfehervar and the formation of a large bridgehead in the Vertes Mountains, it is impossible to break through to Budapest with the available forces, since the enemy was able to create deeply echeloned defensive lines in all potential breakthrough directions. Therefore, before a new offensive to the northeast begins, it is necessary to liquidate the centers of resistance, especially on the flank heights - successively, one after another. The most dangerous enemy defense centers are located almost in the rear of our forward units. They are located in the Lovasberen, Nadap, Pakozd squares, the southeastern outskirts of Zamoy. The enemy is pulling tank units to this area in order to probably break up our units advancing to the north-west.

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Meanwhile, the commander of Army Group South, in a conversation with Guderian, stated: "Assessing the general situation, I want to say that, despite the catastrophic situation in Budapest, its speedy release is hardly possible. The enemy must be destroyed individually. With the successful deployment of the offensive of the 23rd Panzer Division in the direction of Vereb, it would be possible to continue advancing to the northeast again.

But Colonel-General Guderian, unlike Balk, who, in fact, was the author of this strategic idea, was not sure that taking the Soviet grouping north of Lake Velence could change something. . Guderian himself proposed the following plan to the headquarters of Army Group South: "If the offensive to the west fails, and therefore it will not be possible to advance to the northeast, we must consider the prospects for an offensive in the southern

flank of the 2nd Panzer Army. The High Command of the Ground Forces itself, at the first opportunity, will try to transfer part of the forces from the Western Front to this region.

To the question of General Wöhler: "Should the defenders of Budapest hold out until this moment?" - Guderian gave an affirmative answer, asking at the same time to start developing a plan of operation on the southern flank without delay.

The most interesting thing in this situation was that Budapest was located too far from the "southern bridgehead". Its supply by air has actually ceased. Soviet fighters destroyed almost all transport aircraft. Red aviation unequivocally dominated the air over the Hungarian capital.

At the end of the day, the command of Army Group South managed to bring the 356th Infantry Division north of Szekesfehervar, which was supposed to replace the 23rd Panzer Division in this sector of the front. Tankers were supposed to be used, depending on the situation, to continue the offensive on one of the sectors of the front. However, the Soviet command managed to thwart these plans in the bud. Toward evening, units of the 104th Rifle Corps were transferred across the Danube. They immediately began to rapidly move towards Acha (positions of the 23rd Panzer Division

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zii) and Pettendu (positions of the 5th cavalry corps). Now the Soviet numerical and tactical superiority was obvious. The situation in this area has changed radically. A little later, all three Soviet army corps merged into the 26th Rifle Army.

January 27, 1945 (Saturday). Tenth day of operation "Konrad III"

"Temperature - 3 °C. Strong cloud cover. Abundant snowfalls. The roads are covered with huge snowdrifts (up to 1 meter high) and difficult to pass. The Danube on the segment between the Grand and Schutt was covered with ice. Light tanks can cross the ice 2 kilometers up from the bridge destroyed in Grana."

When the time was right and the SS Panzer Corps could move west, a general Soviet counteroffensive was launched. Marshal Tolbukhin planned to win back from the Germans with one blow all the territories they had captured since January 18 between Lake Balaton, Dunaföldvár, Vali and Lake Velence. In the then military language, it sounded like "completely settle the situation on the western bank of the Danube".

On the "southern bridgehead" in the area between the Danube and Sharviz, the Soviet operational corps, supported by several rifle divisions, attacked the positions of the German 3rd Panzer Division on a wide front. The positions at the Shio Canal remained completely uncovered. The advancing units of the Red Army, supported by tank groups (20-30 vehicles each), almost instantly broke through the thin German defense line and quickly rushed to the north.

On the northern flank, the 23rd Soviet tank corps went on the attack. With a force exceeding 100 tanks, he crossed the Vali and tried to get behind the rear of the IV SS Panzer Corps. Suffering huge losses, the Viking division was able to temporarily stop the Soviet tank offensive, thereby removing the corps from the attack. It is significant that even the day before, Gille had warned Balk: "From reliable sources it became known that a large enemy tank formation is approaching us." In response to this, Balk only casually dropped: "In my opinion, this is not a reason to

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stop the offensive in the western direction. The next morning it became clear that the carelessness of the commander of the army group could turn into a military collapse for the Germans.

For some time, the Viking division was able to control a small section of the coast of the Vali River. This was primarily due to the fact that the main blow of the Soviet tanks was aimed from Barachka directly at Szekesfehervar. The breakthrough was so powerful and swift that the units of the Red Army very quickly approached their goal. This time, the Dead Head division and the 1st Panzer Division, which were surrounded by Soviet troops from the north, west and east, were under the threat of encirclement. They were driven out of Pettend almost instantly. The Germans managed to return this village only when the panzergrenadier battalion "Norge", which consisted of Norwegian volunteers, went on the counterattack.

The losses that day were unimaginable. During the counter-attack, the Norge battalion was almost completely destroyed. But the Soviet troops also suffered heavy losses. So, in just one day, the crews of the IV SS Panzer Corps as a whole were able to knock out 122 Soviet tanks. The number speaks for itself. But at the same time, the SS corps itself was surrounded on all sides. Gille decides to go into all-round defense.

Army Group South tried to counterattack. Somewhere it worked. So, for example, the SS regimental group "Ney", which consisted of Hungarian volunteers, with great difficulty was able to capture Hill 182, located east of Szekesfehervar. But it was not possible to keep it for a long time. Despite desperate attempts to continue the offensive, the 3rd German Panzer Corps could not move a meter forward in the Vertesh mountains. A similar situation was observed in the 1st Cavalry Corps. Moreover, the Cavalrymen were forced to leave the territories they had recently occupied.

On that day, even if someone had illusions about the fate of Budapest, he was forced to say goodbye to them. The encircled German-Hungarian group itself also had no chance of breaking through the encirclement from the inside. Major General Gedke, openly assessed

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view of the Hungarian capital as hopeless: "I'm afraid that the failure of the operation in the south may lead to a change in the main goal of the offensive." Unknown; whether SS-Obergruppenführer Gille still believed in the possibility of release. On this day, he did not say anything about this. In any case, nothing depended on his desires. He had to watch as thousands of German and Hungarian soldiers were sacrificed to Hitler. The same as a token of "gratitude" sent another order. In it, the Fuhrer, on behalf of the German and Hungarian peoples, thanked "the defenders of Budapest for their selflessness and heroic struggle against the common enemy." But the most "reassuring" was the last sentence: "Distant Budapest must be considered an impregnable fortress until the hour of its liberation strikes." It was almost openly stated that the encircled group must completely perish.

Meanwhile, Soviet troops were squeezing pincers around a significant part of the army group Balka. But even in this catastrophic situation, Balk continued to weave intrigues. At 10:20, in a conversation with General Weöhler, he stated in all seriousness: "As a result of many hours of delay in the offensive [At the SS Panzer Corps, now the entire northern flank of the army group is forced to go on the defensive." I wonder how the timely offensive of the SS tank corps could interfere with the most powerful Soviet counter-offensive aimed at the rear of this corps? In fairness, I must say what exactly. Gille's delay was able to save several German divisions from imminent annihilation. In response to the statement, General Wöhler only said: "From now on, I ask the commander of the army group, General Balk, to lead [U the SS Panzer Corps] as effectively as possible." Given Balk's character and mannerisms, it was not surprising that he was already beginning to look for someone to blame for the failure of Operation Konrad III. There were many. In the morning report, Major General Gedke reported: "It is unfortunate that the Luftwaffe units overlooked the transfer of the XXIII Soviet tank corps across the Danube."

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By noon, the headquarters of the army group Balka decided to withdraw the 23rd Panzer Division from near Szekesfehervar and transfer it south of the city. Regardless of the general situation in the combat area, it had to resist the Soviet troops advancing from the Danube. The Holste divisional group (4th cavalry brigade and subordinate 2nd Hungarian tank division) was supposed to change the division on the former sector of the front. The 356th Infantry Division, which was already beginning to unload from the trains at Veszprem, was also to be sent to Székesfehérvár.

At 2 pm, General Balk requested that the 1st Panzer Division, which was part of the [U SS Panzer Corps, III Panzer Corps. To some extent, this was justified, since the SS divisions were at a certain distance, and the Germans urgently needed to straighten the arc that had arisen to the north of Lake Velence. It was assumed that the forces of the 1st, 3rd and 23rd Panzer Divisions could stop the Soviet counteroffensive. First of all, this concerned the "southern bridgehead", where three Soviet tank brigades were advancing, and in the near future the appearance of the 18th tank corps was expected. Under these conditions, Holste's divisional group was subordinate to Gille. These forces were supposed to hold the front between the Danube and Lake Velence along the Vali River. At the same time, the SS division "Dead Head" was supposed to move along the southern coast of the Velenza in the direction of Szekesfehervar, where it was supposed to meet with the divisional group Holste. They were then to link up with the SS Division Whe-King.

All this day passed under the sign of structural transformations. On the northern flank of the USh, the Hungarian army corps was subordinated | cavalry corps. On the basis of this connection, the Hartenack corps group was formed. The result of this regrouping was that the GU Panzer Corps and the Cavalry Corps, previously the southern and northern "neighbors" of the Sh Panzer Corps, now had a common border. The Sh Tank Corps itself was planned to be transferred to the "southern bridgehead".

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When, at 17:25, Colonel General Guderian asked: "Can the IV SS Panzer Corps continue the offensive?" Grolman gave an unequivocal answer: "No." Only after that Guderian announced the order of the Fuhrer: the GU Panzer Corps should go on the defensive, and it was necessary to attack with the forces of the 1st and 3rd Panzer Divisions, and then only on the southern flank of the battle. The 23rd Panzer Division was to remain at Szekesfehervar until more significant forces appeared at the disposal of the army group Balka. Guderian specifically emphasized: "The Führer pointed out that no surprises should happen in the Szekesfehervar area."

At 5:30 p.m., at the headquarters of Army Group South, these "wishes" of Hitler were turned into a concrete plan of operational actions, which included the following:

- 1) The offensive of the IV Panzer Corps on the northern flank had to be stopped immediately.
- 2) The divisions [At the tank corps were to take up defensive positions on the segment between the Vali River and Lake Velence.
- 3) From under Szekesfehervar to the southern bridgehead to the 3rd Panzer Division, the 1st Panzer Division should have been transferred. The 23rd Panzer Division was to remain near Szekesfehervar.
- 4) The 23rd Panzer Division was to hold Szekesfehervar until they were delivered

fresh strength.

By evening, the headquarters found out what forces were advancing in the south. The Soviet counteroffensive involved at least two tank brigades from the 18th Tank Corps and six rifle divisions from the 30th and 133rd Rifle Corps. General Bulk did not expect such a development of events. In the south, there was clearly not enough strength to hold back the Soviet avalanche. He understood that without the 23rd Panzer Division remaining near Szekesfehervar, he

it would hardly have been possible to hold the "southern bridgehead" for a long time. He demanded an urgent transfer to the area of the 356th Infantry Division and the People's Artillery Corps.

But the headquarters of Army Group South was in no hurry to make such a decision. There they frankly waited and rebuilt

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hoovyvalis. "The Fuhrer's order must be carried out unquestioningly, and it only says that under any circumstances only Szekesfehervar must be kept. It is better to accept defeat in the north or south than to lose this important strategic object.

An hour later, Lieutenant General Grolman was able to convince Major General Gaedke to transfer the 6th Panzer Division to the Szekesfehervar area, which unsuccessfully tried to advance in the Vertes Mountains.

Already January 28, 1945 in | | hour 10 minutes The High Command gave instructions to prepare for an offensive on the "southern bridgehead" with the aim of capturing Dunafejöldvár.

Operation Konrad II is over. Like the two previous operations of the same name, it ended in failure: the fate of Budapest was sealed. The agony of the besieged city continued for another two weeks.

Speaking about the reasons for the failures of all three Konrad operations, we will immediately discard the statements traditional for German historiography about the clear numerical superiority of the Soviet troops. We will also not go into details of the mutual accusations that the German generals made against each other after the war.

There are several reasons for the failure of the German operations to unblock Budapest:

1) Three operations "Konrad", aimed at breaking through the ring of the Soviet encirclement around the Hungarian capital, did not bring the expected results, because, according to the General of the Armored Forces, Baron Geyer von Schweppenburg, "there were too many of them for such small strength."

2) Separately, it is worth noting the almost complete absence of interaction between the High Command of the Wehrmacht and the High Command of the Ground Forces (which, in fact, has already been mentioned above). The cooperation of these two instances was carried out exclusively through Hitler, which could not have a positive effect on the planning of military operations. As an example, we can cite the preparations for Operation Icebreaker, when, with the participation of Army Group F, Army Group Balka and the 2nd Tank Army (Army Group South) could take the troops of Marshal Tolbukhin into pincers. It is worth noting that

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and the marshal himself was very afraid of such a development of events. If the Germans had carried out such a plan, the 3rd Ukrainian Front, split into several parts, would have been withdrawn from active offensive operations for a long time.

At this point, one cannot fail to note significant differences in operational tactics. While Hitler was literally obsessed with the defense of large areas that had to be held at any cost (Demyansk, Stalingrad, Budapest, Breslau), the General Staff of the Ground Forces relied primarily on the destruction of Soviet Russian troops both in the offensive and in defense, which implied more flexible tactics, including in matters of holding territories and facilities. Such a different perception of the goals of military operations led to the fact that the German troops were not assigned clear tasks. To all this were added numerous "discrepancies" that could be observed in headquarters at various levels.

3) The Germans were not able to optimally use the concentration of forces. Such mistakes could very often be observed already at the planning stage of military operations, especially offensive ones. Instead of concentrating all available forces on achieving a specific strategic goal (for example, releasing Budapest), they were deployed to solve secondary tactical tasks ("complete settlement of the situation on the western bank of the Danube", "destruction of the enemy on our left flank", etc.). As a result, any more or less powerful Soviet counteroffensive put the German command to a standstill. In this situation, sometimes completely ridiculous excuses were used ("we incorrectly estimated the number of Soviet troops", "a division was suddenly transferred"). There was a feeling that the German generals did not foresee such a possibility. As a result, even more disastrous (for the Germans) decisions were made to transfer the epicenter of the struggle to another sector of the front. Like, it was supposed to keep the Soviet troops in constant tension. Theoretically, such a message could be correct, if we do not take into account that such actions more and more removed the command of the armies and army groups from reaching the main, initially

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designated target. As a result, the planned operation turned into many protracted battles of a local nature.

4) An incorrectly estimated time factor can be singled out as a "chronic illness" of the German general. As soon as the operation began, it turned out that either bad weather or broken or icy roads interfered with the set pace of the offensive. At the same time, I would like to pay special attention to the problem of bringing up divisions, which eventually resulted in a no less chronic "understaffing". At the same time, artillery advanced to its initial positions for the longest time. Deprived of real artillery training, ordinary German soldiers paid for the mistakes of command, who went on the offensive in understaffed divisions. A direct continuation of the "time factor" was the terrible supply of German units on the front line. As a result, "saving" on time, the German generals had to carry out repeated offensives again and again.

5) At least during the operation "Konrad I", and by and large - during all three operations, tank divisions were used without adequate (in the first case, without any) support from other types of troops. In the conditions of a breakthrough of the Soviet defense in depth, which was accompanied by the active use of anti-tank guns, minefields, wire and anti-tank barriers, a "purely tank" offensive could not have the slightest chance of success. The reason for this was, again, haste. The lack of infantry or motorized infantry support was explained by the fact that the arrival of these units at their original positions required much more time. The Konrad operations may go down in history as a "classic" example of how tank units should not be used.

6) Panzer formations could suddenly penetrate into Soviet positions, but at the same time they were exposed to a real threat of counterattacks from the flanks, which were not covered by infantry. The "fingers" that appeared were easily "amputated" in the course of two counter blows from the flanks.

7) The effect of surprise, which was so much hoped for at the headquarters of Army Group South, actually took place

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only at the beginning of Operation Konrad 1. In all other cases, the Soviet command was already ready for defense (which is a separate merit of Marshal Tolbukhin). Therefore, the surprise at the headquarters of the army group Balka and at the headquarters of the army group "South" is incomprehensible, when the advancing tank units stumbled upon the powerful defensive lines of the Red Army. As a result, the losses in the advancing units were much higher than planned during the development of the operation.

8) Despite the Hungarian officers at their disposal, the German generals (apparently due to distrust of the Hungarians) did not use their knowledge of the terrain in any way, and most importantly, their knowledge of the landscape features in certain weather conditions. Leaving unattended the impassability of roads, forests and mountains, the dates for the beginning, development and potential end of the operation were initially incorrectly determined. It remains unclear why in January such factors as snow, snow with rain, ice, snowdrifts, thaws, which turned mountain roads into swamp slurry, were not taken into account. As a result, the territory, as it were, "locked" the advancing units, forcing them to stretch into long columns.

9) Separately, I would like to note the division of organically united units (divisions, regiments). Such a practice was especially dangerous for tank divisions, which, with rare exceptions, had worked formations. The chaotic use of tank units led to the fact that "homeless" tank battalions arose on the west bank of the Danube, which were deprived of any supply, and therefore could not effectively participate in hostilities for a long time.

10) Due to the obvious superiority of Soviet aviation at the end of the war, the main movements and regroupings had to be carried out after dark. This, of course, protected against Soviet attack aircraft and bombers, but at the same time made it difficult to command individual units and formations in general.

Part 2 PREPARING FOR THE BIG THROW

Chapter 1 HITLER'S PLANS AFTER THE ARDENNE

At the time of the events described in the previous chapters, the German offensive in the Ardennes was in full swing on the Western Front. Colonel General Guderian recommended in advance to abandon this operation, since even if it were successful, the costs of its implementation would be incredibly high. Nevertheless, Hitler, Field Marshal Keitel (Wehrmacht High Command) and Colonel General Jodl (Wehrmacht Operations Headquarters) chose not to take Guderian's arguments into account. They believed that the Ardennes Offensive could be a turning point in the entire Second World War.

On December 24, 1944 (the day when the encirclement around Budapest was already closed) Guderian arrived at Hitler's Headquarters "Eagle's Nest", located in Ziegenberg (Hesse). He intended to categorically demand the cancellation of the operation planned on the Western Front. He considered it an unnecessary waste of time and effort, which he so badly needed on the Eastern Front. He talked about the overwhelming numerical superiority of the Soviet troops, about a 15-fold superiority in ground weapons and almost 20-fold in the air. And these words were not some kind of exaggeration. Guderian himself knew that the Soviet command was planning to launch a general offensive around January 12th. But these words did not touch Hitler. He answered indifferently: "This is the biggest deception of Genghis Khan. Who told you such nonsense?"
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Reichsführer SS Heinrich Himmler, who by that time had become actively involved in military affairs, who was nearby, echoed: "This is just a grandiose disinformation. I firmly believe that nothing is happening on the Eastern Front." Guderian could not change anything. Moreover, as we remember, [the SS Panzer Corps was withdrawn from Poland. Against the will of Guderian, he was transferred from the Vistula to Hungary.

During the battle in the Ardennes, despite the warnings of German strategists, Hitler could not muster up the courage to move the epicenter of the offensive from the 6th Panzer Army, whose right flank "sagged", to the 5th Panzer Army. army, which most of all succeeded during this operation. Since the Führer stubbornly adhered to the plan he had originally devised, the offensive completely went astray and stalled. When, on December 26, a decision was made to

shifting the "center of gravity" of the blow inflicted by the Germans, then (as, however, often in such situations) it was already too late.

On a huge sector of the front, the German army was almost instantly forced to switch from offensive to defensive. But Hitler did not give up hope to successfully complete the Ardennes offensive. He accepted the offer of the Commander-in-Chief in the West, General Field Marshal Rundstedt (Chief of Staff - General of the Cavalry Westphal) to begin a distraction operation in Northern Alsace. This operation was codenamed "Northern Wind". It began simultaneously with Operation Konrad on January 1, 1945. At first, everything went quite well, but by mid-January, it began to fade.

In the early days of 1945, a new solution matured for Hitler. He planned to withdraw the 6th SS Panzer Army from the Ardennes, replenish it, and then transfer it to the Eastern Front. The German command of the army was not yet ready to admit the failure of the Ardennes offensive, but due to huge human and material losses, discontent began to spread among the generals. General Tippelskirch wrote about this:

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"During the retreat, we lost more tanks and assault guns than during the entire offensive. It was a very strong blow to the psychological mood in the units. The sight of SS units pulled up from the West was especially depressing. Even if they had to be replenished in order to be further used on another sector of the front, it still made an unfavorable impression on the army units, since now the main burden of the battle had to fall on their shoulders. This was a huge psychological miscalculation, which, however, never affected the front-line relations between SS officials and army employees.

It is significant that it was the Ardennes operation, unsuccessfully planned by Hitler, that became the starting point of his deep disappointment in his own Waffen-SS formations. The English historian Liddell Hart noted in this regard: "This failure ruined the whole reputation of the Waffen-SS."

However, Hitler's adjutant Otto Günsche spoke somewhat differently about this: "At that time, I did not get the impression that the Fuhrer blamed the Waffen-SS units for the failure of the Ardennes offensive." But we will return to this subject a little later.

During the operational meeting, which was attended by the Commander-in-Chief of the Luftwaffe, Reichsmarschall Hermann Göring and the commander of the West Army Group, Field Marshal Rundstedt, Hitler announced his intention to withdraw the 6th Panzer Army from the Western Front in order to create on its basis of a powerful reserve. At that moment, not a word was said about her transfer to the Eastern Front, as Colonel General Guderian demanded.

For a long time it was not possible to begin the withdrawal of this "reserve of the Wehrmacht High Command", since the Anglo-American troops attacked the 6th Panzer Army from almost all sides. In addition, her disappearance from the Western Front would have been immediately noted by Western reconnaissance aircraft. The transfer was also associated with another risk. - British and American aviation, domination

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flying in the air in this region, could cause huge damage to the retreating tank army. In those days, Western stormtroopers literally hunted every vehicle like hunting dogs after a hare. As on the Eastern Front, any movement was possible only at night, but even in these conditions they were associated with heavy losses. While the withdrawal of the 6th Panzer Army from the West was very slow, Hitler decided to transfer it after replenishment to the Eastern Front. The sector of the front where this armada was supposed to be was not yet determined.

But the events that were rapidly developing both on the Eastern and Western fronts very quickly influenced the choice of Hitler. On January 12, 1945, exactly as Guderian pointed out, the general offensive of the Red Army began. A day later, the Western allies began active operations. Hitler was in a state of shock.

On the night of January 19-20, 1945, Rundstedt received an order to prepare to withdraw the 6th Panzer Army as soon as possible. At 7 pm on January 20, the withdrawal of the 1st SS Panzer Corps began, which was heading "to the East near Berlin."

Whether Hitler really planned to leave the 6th Army near Berlin, or it was just a trick, a deceptive maneuver that was supposed to mislead Soviet intelligence, is still unknown. But in any case, two days later, on January 22, 1945, Soviet troops reached the Oder, and in another sector of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, together with the Bulgarian army, they began to threaten the oil-producing region located in Western Hungary and Lake Balaton .

At that moment, the quarterly personnel of the 6th SS Panzer Army was sent to Bad Saarow, a place located 50 kilometers from Berlin on Lake Scharmützel. According to the original plan, it was there that the 6th Panzer Army was to be located.

But in fact, at that moment, Hitler was already planning to pincer units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. One blow was supposed to be delivered by mobile units from

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near Szekesfehervar (army group Balka and 6th Panzer Army). Another blow was to be carried out by several divisions that crossed the Drava (Army Group F). They were supposed to advance on the city of Pec. And one more blow had to be delivered in the middle, in the area of the city of Nadkanizhy, that is, south of Lake Balaton. After gaining a foothold in Western Hungary, Hitler planned to provide the army with local oil. After completing this task, most of the tank divisions would be sent much further north to the Vistula, at the disposal of the command of Army Group Center.

At this time, Colonel General Guderian tried to captivate Hitler with new ideas regarding the use of tank divisions released in the West on the Eastern Front. He proposed to attack the wedge of the Soviet offensive from the flanks, while it had not yet gained momentum. In vain! As always, Hitler was adamant. The decision was made, and nothing could force Hitler to change it. In those days, he only raved about "the battle for Hungary in the name of saving the oil fields": These divisions could be transferred to the territory of Silesia only when Germany would have won this battle. Guderian wasted his time trying to convince the Führer to transfer the 6th Panzer Army to the banks of the Oder. To all the proposals, Hitler only ironically remarked: "Do you want to attack without oil? I don't mind, try it, and I'll see what you get out of this venture."

The "fuel issue" was the very determining factor that prompted Hitler to send SS Panzer divisions not to the Vistula, to Army Group Center, but to Hungary, transferring them to Army Group South.

On January 22, Colonel General Jodl commented on the so-called "Führer position" (a phrase that has become almost an official turn):

"The Führer again pointed out the great importance of the oil fields located southwest of Lake Balaton. Control over them is decisive in the further conduct of the war. And this circumstance

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It will be up to us to settle the situation in the space between Budapest and Lake Balaton. This must be done immediately with all available forces, even though several operational formations of Army Group A and Center will suffer as a result of such a decision.

In the same way, Hitler justified his decision during a conversation with the Commander-in-Chief of the German Naval Forces, Grand Admiral Dönitz, which took place on January 23 at 16:00:

"When discussing the situation on the Eastern Front, the Fuhrer prioritized the tasks associated with it. In the first place were Hungarian oil and the oil industry of the Vienna Basin, since without this oil (which is 80% of all oil production), the subsequent waging of the war was simply meaningless. In second place was the bay of Danzig as a natural prerequisite for the continuation of submarine warfare and the industrial region of Upper Silesia as the main center of the military industry and the largest coal basin in the Reich.

Actually, the "fuel question" and the oil production for Nazi Germany connected with it are far beyond the scope of this book. Therefore, when considering and evaluating military operations on the territory of Hungary in 1945, one should always keep this problem in mind. Hitler did not forget the experience of the First World War, when the Entente literally "bathed" in oil.

Chapter 2 TRANSFER OF THE 6th SS TANK ARMY

The implementation of Hitler's order, which was passed on to Rundstedt, did not proceed as quickly as the Fuhrer expected. The withdrawal of tank units from the Ardennes front was planned to be carried out to some area west of the Rhine. It was assumed that they would be replenished in the region,

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wounded by the cities of Bitburg, Mayen, Prüm, Oiskrichen. The main reason for the delay could be considered the fact that the withdrawal, movement to the single-track railway, loading and, finally, the transportation itself across the Rhine was carried out under bombing and Allied air raids. The whole process, as expected, turned out to be associated with significant losses. On January 8, Field Marshal Rundstedt transmitted Hitler's order to all army groups subordinate to him. But in practice, it turned out to be not so easy to remove a tank army from the front (4 tank divisions = 2 tank corps) and, without collapsing the defense line, transfer it to the rear.

The High Command of the Wehrmacht tried for some time to get off with lengthy excuses. So, for example, in the duty log dated January 11, there is an entry: "The transfer of tank divisions is carried out in accordance with the instructions received." In practice, this meant that it was only on January 11 that some units of the 6th SS Panzer Army began to withdraw.

In fact, by the middle of the month, only individual tank regiments and headquarters were able to leave the Ardennes Front. At the same time, the remaining units were temporarily transferred under the command of other headquarters. As a result, the situation on the Ardennes front, already not the easiest, ran the risk of becoming completely confused. Confusion arose in those days almost constantly - the tankers could not figure out to whom they were subordinate this time and which division they belonged to. In addition, it was not worth disregarding not the best winter roads, along which it was hardly possible to quickly reach the designated goal. During the day, it was not safe to make your way along them because of the constant raids of the Allies, at night - because of heavy fog and poor visibility. As a result, almost all roads and highways were clogged with tank units. It took a lot of effort to get ahead. When the transfer was to end, no one could guess. The bustle on the roads also intensified because they were intended not only for the tanks of the 6th SS Army. Cars with ammunition and provisions were constantly rushing towards the front. At the same time to the rear

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cars with the wounded raced by. To all this was added the equipment of the German divisions, which regrouped and redeployed. On many roads there were impassable traffic jams from tanks, cars, armored personnel carriers, assault guns, tractors pulling heavy artillery. A similar picture could be observed at virtually every bridge or railway crossing. With the onset of darkness, the contours of vehicles appeared out of nowhere - a new front-line reality began, a "war for the road". They could not cope with traffic jams, despite special radio communications, scheduling, and special outfits of the field gendarmerie. Anger and frustration accumulated in such military traffic jams. |

However, for Hitler, everything looked not so difficult. He planned to deploy the 6th Panzer Army to Germany. But, even having reached the Rhine, the tankers did not get rid of all the problems. Loading, and most importantly, transportation by rail in the face of a clear lack of coal was also not an easy task. In addition, a significant part of the railway track was destroyed by allied bombardments. By and large, railway communication in those days in Germany was paralyzed. But crossing under its own power was a waste of fuel. In those days, gasoline and diesel fuel were sold mainly only to tanks and assault guns.

If we turn to the entries in the duty log of the Wehrmacht High Command, we can find that on January 12 an entry was made: "The 2nd SS Panzer Division is again temporarily used."

And already on January 14, in the same war diary of the Wehrmacht command, it was stated: "A crisis has arisen on the northwestern coast. The almost completely withdrawn 2nd and 9th SS Panzer Divisions are being used again. Naturally, it was about combat use at the front. The command of the 6th SS Panzer Army also could not leave the Ardennes front overnight. After the withdrawal of the Guy P of the SS tank corps, it received part of the neighboring armies. Exactly

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German technology could not get through the clogged roads

this can explain the notes made on January 15 about the participation of the 6th army in the hostilities (in fact, by that time most of it was already on the march): "On the left flank of the 6th tank army (116th tank and 560th People's Grenadier Division) a crisis situation arose. The 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" must again join the battle.

On January 16, 1945, the following entry was made: "The left wing of the 15th Army was attacked by the enemy. The 6th Panzer Army was brought in to repel the attack. Heavy battles are again going on at the front... A significant part of the formed reserves has been involved in repelling the enemy offensive. Forced to use them again in battle.

And here is the entry dated January 17, 1945: "The defensive battle in the Ardennes continues. For this reason, the use of the 2nd SS Panzer Division and the Grenadier Brigade is again required. Several attacks on the border between the positions of the 15th and 6th tank armies.

Actually, the mass withdrawal of tank divisions began only on January 18th. Although the onslaught of the Allied troops on the positions of the 6th Panzer Army was by no means weakened. Fierce fighting took place in the area of St. Vita and east of Vilsalm. And only on January 20, 1945, that is, twelve days after Hitler had given the order, three of the four panzer divisions that made up the 6th SS Panzer Army were from

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withdrawn from the front line: "The 1st, 2nd and 12th SS Panzer Divisions are withdrawn. Snow drifts on the roads make it difficult to get around." The full assembly of the 6th Panzer Army in the operational rear took place only on January 22: "All tanks are withdrawn. The positions of the 6th Panzer Army are partly occupied by the 5th

army, and partly by the 7th army. The 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen was the last to leave the front line. By the way, it was this SS division that was in the reserve of the Wehrmacht High Command under Army Group B for the longest time, until it finally ended up in a new combat area.

"Now all SS connections are withdrawn. Exceptionally clear weather makes daytime travel impossible. At night, whose roads are poorly distinguishable. The lack of fuel is a concern." The records of this period, made in the duty journal and combat journal of the High Command of the Wehrmacht, are noteworthy, if only because they, in connection with the withdrawal of the 6th Panzer Army, for the first time raise the problems of traffic congestion and the dominance of Anglo-American pilots over Western Europe. But since getting to the railway was still half the trouble (the army had to be transferred safe and sound along it to its destination), Hitler gave the order to assign the 3rd Luftwaffe anti-aircraft artillery corps to protect the echelons transporting the 6th Panzer Army. Anti-aircraft guns were to move along with the SS formations, and then, just like the tank divisions, be used on the Eastern Front. In addition, special anti-aircraft units began to be created with each division, corps and army in the Reich, since the so-called ground anti-aircraft artillery was not a means sufficient to repel Soviet and allied air raids. This was largely due to the fact that air raids on Zossen became more frequent, and the Wehrmacht High Command, as well as the ground forces, felt the degree of danger of such bombardments.

Among other things, the use of the forces of the III anti-aircraft corps of the Luftwaffe contributed to restoring order to

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railways, since most trains ran at night, fearing bombing and air raids. The presence of anti-aircraft guns helped to somehow cope with the transport paralysis, which spread even to the territories located east of the Rhine.

The replenishment of the SS formations, which had suffered losses in previous battles, which was extremely necessary for the further conduct of hostilities, also did not go according to plan. Firstly, due to transport problems and the situation on the fronts, the places where the SS Panzer divisions were supposed to receive reinforcements repeatedly changed. The front was getting closer every day, but the echelons with replenishment never arrived. Secondly, the tankers did not receive a single day of rest. As a result, the commanders of tank divisions almost had to knock out reinforcements from the military commissariats themselves. At some point, all tank divisions were fully equipped. But in this case, we are talking about the numerical completeness, and by no means about the qualitative composition. However, a similar picture could be observed everywhere: in the WaffenSS, in the infantry, in the Luftwaffe, in the navy recruited virtually unprepared recruits who did not meet the requirements for a soldier. For the most part, these were conscripts who were "combed out" from schools and various civil services. They had only a couple of weeks of military training behind them.

Of course, none of the recruits were trained for a particular type of troops. Therefore, one of the tasks entrusted to the SS Panzer Divisions was the organization of field training units and the training of "young personnel" in them. The command of these units was entrusted to experienced tankers of all ranks who had gone through the fighting at the front. But even they could not prepare a full-fledged, combat-ready soldier. For this reason, when we talk about SS Panzer divisions in 1945, we must keep in mind that these were slightly different formations than the same divisions three or even two years ago. Constant participation in battles and significant losses could not pass without a trace. Constant use of forms

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Waffen-SS formations, which were sent as a strike force from one battle immediately to another, had a significant impact not only on their morale, but also on the combat capability of the divisions themselves. But at the same time it was necessary to take into account such a factor as the degree of replenishment of the division. In different branches of the military, it was different.

The SS Panzer divisions "Leibstandarte", "Reich", "Hohenstaufen" and "Hitler Youth" moved across Germany to the Eastern Front in the strictest secrecy. At the same time, the transportation of the 6th Panzer Army along the route Cottbus - Forst - Guben - Frankfurt an der Oder - Furstenwalde looked quite plausible. The commander of the 6th Panzer Army, Colonel General of the Waffen-SS Sepp Dietrich, did not miss the opportunity to unnecessarily "demonstratively" flicker in some Berlin instance. The quarterly personnel of the divisions behaved in a similar way. At the same time, false telephone and telegraph conversations were carried out. Something similar happened in the High Command of the Ground Forces, at whose disposal the 6th Panzer Army arrived. The appearance was created that the SS Panzer Army was to remain near Berlin. Every day, supply officers and quartermasters traveled around the outskirts of Berlin, "finding out" where it would be better to place armored divisions. The results of the study of the places were immediately sent by telegraph to the command of the 6th Army "to the West."

On January 24, under the same heightened secrecy, the SS Panzer divisions began to leave Central Germany. First, the SS division Leibstandarte arrived through Dresden and Prague in the vicinity of Vienna. It was followed by the remaining three panzer divisions at certain intervals. At the same time, even when the transportation of all SS formations was completed, "misinformation measures" continued to be carried out east of Berlin. However, the Soviet command already knew that the 6th Panzer Army was heading "somewhere to the East", since the echelons with tanks were attacked by Soviet pilots in the gap between Cottbus and Guben.

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In early February, following the tank divisions from the West, the command of the 6th tank army arrived. Prior to the arrival of Sepp Dietrich, all affairs in Vienna were run by the chief of staff of the army, Major General of the Waffen-SS Kremer. In mid-February 1945, it was the turn of the suppliers and quartermasters. They were supposed to leave Bad Saarow unnoticed by everyone, officially first heading westward, but then changing course by rail to Vienna. As a result, the total time for the transfer of the 6th Panzer Army was several weeks. In addition to observing the measures of extreme caution, these terms were also explained by the pace of transportation, which corresponded to the figure 4, that is, no more than four echelons with equipment and personnel of the SS divisions could be sent per day. In order to assess how low these rates were, I will give as an example the information that in 1941 the transfer of tank divisions was carried out at a rate of 78! That is, in 1945 one could safely talk about the almost complete paralysis of the German transport system. Around February 20, the headquarters of the 6th Army, the actual tank units and various army services reunited. It happened in the area of Győršövenház, a town lying 20 kilometers west of Raab. Judging by the fact that the army headquarters received the code name "Headquarters of the Higher Combat Engineer Command of Hungary", measures of extreme caution have continued to be observed up to now. Sepp Dietrich himself, for the same reasons, remained in Berlin for the time being. Actually, he arrived in the army only at the beginning of March, literally on the eve of a new offensive operation.

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CHAPTER 3 THE NEW PLANS OF ARMY GROUP SOUTH

As we remember, during the attempts to unblock Budapest, Hitler again and again returned to the idea of a "big solution", which assumed "a complete settlement of the situation on the entire western bank of the Danube". He intended to drive the Red Army out of Central and Western Hungary, which would allow him to use the local oil fields without any problems.

sources. Initially, this task should have been attempted by the forces of Army Group "South" and "local" Hungarian military formations. At that moment, when the operation "Konrad II" had not yet ended in a complete failure, the 2nd Panzer Army, located at the southern end of Lake Balaton, received an order to begin preparations for an offensive in the direction of Kaposvár. As mentioned above, this operation was to be codenamed "Icebreaker".

This order was received on January 19. And a day later, on January 20, a meeting was held at the General Staff of the Ground Forces, which was attended by the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast (officially he was subordinate to the Wehrmacht High Command). The meeting discussed the prospects for cooperation between the 2nd Panzer Army and the northern wing of Army Group F, which were to pin down the forces of the 3rd Ukrainian Front during the offensive. But in order to approve this decision, not only the consent of the headquarters of the operational leadership of the Wehrmacht was required, but also the sanction of Hitler. Three days passed, and Colonel-General Guderian reported to the headquarters of Army Group South that "the Führer intends to fully regulate the situation in the territories west of the Danube" (see previous chapters). The Commander-in-Chief in the South-East, who was included in the headquarters of the Wehrmacht's operational leadership, also contacted the command of Army Group South. In a conversation, he said that he had ordered Army Group F to prepare four divisions, which

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which were supposed to support the offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army. Actually, these four divisions were supposed to strike at the 3rd Ukrainian Front from the territory of Croatia, on the front between Osijek (Esseg) and Donji Mikholyats. A possible date for the start of the joint offensive was 6 February. As mentioned above, the command of Army Group South began to categorically demand that Operation Icebreaker begin a week and a half earlier, that is, on January 26th. At the same time, a short entry was made in the duty log of the Wehrmacht headquarters: "The attack of the 2nd Panzer Army is foreseen."

At the same time, Guderian demanded that an operation plan be developed, which provided for a strike on the southern flank of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. At the same time, he hinted that for its implementation it would be necessary to transfer certain forces from the Western Front. In a report on the events of the second half of January 1945, compiled for the headquarters of the operational leadership of the Wehrmacht, Colonel Meyer-Detring noted the following:

"The position of Army Group South is characterized by a successful offensive launched by separate formations northeast of Lake Balaton. Yesterday (January 28) the offensive began on the southern flank. The concentration of enemy forces to launch an offensive on the northern bank of the Danube in the direction of Bratislava is not ruled out. Two armored corps are brought into the Hungarian region from the west, and the 356th infantry division has already partially arrived from the southwest. These forces are supposed to crush the southern flank of the Russian troops, which will free up their own divisions from near Budapest. During this operation, about twelve divisions can be released, which will be able to take part in the battles on the Eastern Front.

All these plans were to become part of the "big decision" about which Hitler spoke more and more often to the officers of the General Staffs.

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To "settle the situation on the territory bounded by the Danube, Drava, Balaton and Triangulum"!, the commander proposed two "solutions":

"a) The big decision should regulate the situation immediately throughout the entire territory of this triangle. In this case, the epicenter of the offensive is transferred to three divisions, which are supposed to force the Drava near Osijek. Being under flank cover, they push the Soviet troops away from the Danube crossing at Apatin, Bezdan and Mokhach. The offensive continues

up to reaching the Baia-Batasek line, where they can begin to interact with the tank units of the army group Balka. At the same time, units advancing from the Donji Miholjac area should be covered by a reinforced divisional group. It should also support the offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army, which is designed to strike east from the territory of Nagybayom.

6) A smaller solution provides for the possibility of a concentrated offensive of troops from the area of Donji Miholjac to the east of Pec. Having chosen the shortest path, they move towards Nagybayom, where they unite with units of the 2nd Panzer Army.

The forces expected to take part in the offensive, adjusted for the condition of the roads and the weather, and also depending on the actions of the enemy, should reach their starting positions to the Drava by February 6, 1945.

The Commander-in-Chief in the South-East, on the basis of these proposals, and also taking into account the plans for Operation Icebreaker previously developed at the headquarters of the 2nd Tank Army, combined a new offensive idea for Army Group South. Army group Balka with two tank corps (corps group Bright and IV SS Panzer Corps) was to advance from the Szekes area

1 This refers to the place where the borders of Austrian Styria, Western Hungary and Slovenia converge at one point.

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fehervar due south, towards Dombovar and Szekszárd. After that, they should turn to the EAST.

At the headquarters of the 2nd Panzer Army, they were able to coordinate the operation "Icebreaker" only as an offensive of two infantry divisions and a motorized brigade from Kaposvár to Dombvar in conditions when a less powerful gruppa was supposed to strike from Dombvar to the area lying to the south Pecha. At the same time, the flanks of the advancing units of the "Ruling Cabinet" of the 6th Panzer were to be covered by the army. In the first row on the left - Kremer with at least one division. od

At the same time, Army Group F (Commander-in-Chief in the South-East), with the forces of either of the two divisions, was to attack from the Osijek area in the direction of Mohacs and Bayi. The second division was supposed to strike from under Donji Miholyats on Pecs. Pressed from both sides, the Soviet-Bulgarian troops had to either find themselves in pincers of encirclement, or retreat to the eastern bank of the Danube.

Needless to say, the headquarters of Army Group South also wanted to take part in the implementation of this plan.

Three points were put forward as prerequisites for the participation of Army Group South in this enterprise. Firstly, the operation "Konrad III" was able to isolate the Soviet troops located between the Danube and the Vertesh Mountains. Secondly, in the location of the 8th Army on the northern bank of the Danube, almost nothing happened. The positions of this army seemed so well fortified that even a powerful Soviet offensive could hardly fundamentally change the situation on this sector of the front. Thirdly, in addition to the standard replenishment of tank divisions, the command of the army group

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"South" were to be placed at the disposal of another 2-3 new infantry divisions.

The command of Army Group South substantiated its position in numerous messages sent to the General Staff of the Ground Forces. But at the same time, everything possible was done not to indicate the specific date of the planned offensive. Also, similar messages were sent to the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast, who, among other things, was asked

send an officer of the headquarters of Army Group F, authorized to discuss the details of the interaction of both operational-strategic formations. In this situation, Guderian somewhat abstained from planning the operation, declaring that it was not within his competence to determine the date for the start of the offensive. As a result, the proposal of the Commander-in-Chief in the South-East, Field Marshal Weichs, to launch the offensive no earlier than February 6, 1945, was accepted. |

Already from what considerations were laid down in the plan of this operation, it is clear that the "big decision" originally proposed by the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast, Field Marshal Weichs, was perceived as very "clumsy". For this reason, it was carefully abandoned. On 29 January, the officer in charge of operations planning at the Commander-in-Chief in the South-East, the so-called 1st Staff Officer - 1a - reported to the headquarters of Army Group South that the "small decision" was taken as the basis and in accordance with they need to carry out all the necessary calculations. It was at that moment that the command of the 2nd Panzer Army reported problems with the Hungarian units, which almost completely crossed over to the Soviet side. The consequence of this unforeseen circumstance could be a delay in the start of Operation Icebreaker. At the very least, it would not gain momentum as quickly as it was originally planned.

While the planning of a new military operation was going on, the High Command of the Ground Forces informed the headquarters of the Army Group South about the provision of

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Special Reserve Command. But even this news was "dosed out". On January 29, the transfer of the SS Panzer Corps (SS divisions Leibstandarte and Hitler Youth) to Army Group I was announced. And only | February, news came that the II SS Panzer Corps (SS divisions "Reich" and "Hohenstaufen") would arrive after them. "Fresh SS formations" immediately captured all the thoughts of the staff officers, who were eager to send them into battle as soon as possible. But at the same time, it was necessary to take into account the changed balance of forces, which should automatically entail a change in strategic plans. |

In a conversation with General Wenck, which took place on January 31, the Chief of Staff of Army Group South, Lieutenant General Grolman, said about the tense situation around Szekesfehervar, which was still held by the Germans: "The Army Group could successfully counteract howl to the enemy if we got fresh parts. General Wenck replied that their arrival "should be expected within the next five days." These were somewhat optimistic dates. But in his words, the most important thing for the command of the army group sounded: "The Führer himself authorized their use."

To discuss the plan for a new offensive, which received the code name "South Wind", the commander of Army Group South, General Wöhler, flew to Berlin. There he was twice at Hitler's Headquarters - on February 8 and 9, 1945, respectively. Direct preparations for the offensive began with the arrival of the 1st SS Panzer Corps in Hungary. .

As the Soviet command concentrated significant forces on the northern bank of the Danube on the bridgehead near the Gran (Pliev's cavalry units were brought up), Hitler became more and more puzzled by the fate of the oil refineries in Komarom. He realized that the Soviet offensive in this sector of the front not only threatened the Danube flank of the army group Balka, but also, if successful, opened the way for the Red Army to Vienna. As a result, the decision was made

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the forces of both SS tank corps to liquidate the Soviet bridgehead in the vicinity of the Gran, and then create four own bridgeheads in the same area.

On February 10, 1945, the Chief of Staff of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, SS Obersturmbannführer Lehmann, received instructions from Lieutenant General Grolmann. He had to familiarize himself with the new combat missions of the tank corps. Below we consider this plot in more detail. At the same time, it cannot be ruled out that Rudolf Lehmann, Chief of Staff, during his visit of the SS Panzer Corps in Berlin, Wöhler received from Hitler not only an order to carry out Operation South Wind, but also an instruction to modify the plan for Operation South, to which Hitler never gave his consent. This meant only one thing - it was necessary to plan the next "big decision", a large-scale action in which all the military units deployed to Hungary would take part. Hitler himself demanded that the results of planning a new operation be provided to him as soon as possible.

On February 22, 1945, the command of the Army Group "South" sent four variants of the operation (A, B, C1 and C2) to the General Staff of the Ground Forces, called "Spring Awakening". Each of the four options provided for the pushback of Soviet troops beyond the Danube. The main role in all options, of course, was assigned to the 6th Panzer Army. Actually, from the very code name it followed that the offensive was planned for the beginning of spring, for the first days of March 1945. But, as we will see below, almost all rules have exceptions.

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Chapter 4

"LEAKAGE" OF THE 6TH ARMY INTO HUNGARY: ACCOMMODATION AND MASKING

While the plans for various variants of military operations were being discussed, the first echelons with the 1st SS Panzer Corps began to arrive in the vicinity of Vienna. It was then that the High Command of the Ground Forces decided to open the cards to the command of Army Group South.

On January 29, 1945, at 6 o'clock in the morning, the headquarters of the army group was informed of the speedy arrival of the reserve of the High Command - [SS Panzer Corps (Leibstandarte and Hitler Youth divisions)]. From the headquarters of the Army Group "South" it was required not only to accept and place SS tankers, to establish a supply system, but also to observe precautionary measures, which were expressed in the disguise of the arriving divisions. Formally, [the tank corps became part of the Balka army group, but this only concerned supply issues. In fact, the elite SS divisions were subordinate only to the command of Army Group South.

On the evening of the same day, at 7:25 p.m., a request was sent from the headquarters of the army group to the High Command: "Should we place the arriving units in the Raab area overcrowded with troops or move them closer to their original positions?" In accordance with Hitler's directive, it was decided to unload the SS Panzer divisions near Raab.

It is striking that in the orders of the headquarters of Army Group South there is not even a hint of secrecy. It was introduced a little later, when Hitler, at the suggestion of the High Command, signed the "Instructions on the conduct of defensive battles by Army Group South". As measures to maintain secrecy, one can consider the strictest ban on mutual visits to division headquarters, dissemination of data on the military potential of individual units and formations, etc. However, it is possible that such instructions were transmitted orally by Hitler to General Wöhler when the group commander

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Operation Konrad III. Situation on January 22, 1945

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Beginning of the Vienna Offensive. Situation on March 20, 1945

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Colonel General Guderian (in black uniform of tank troops) with General Wenck discussing the situation on the Eastern Front

Guderian leaves the headquarters of one of his subordinate corps after a meeting

Reichsfuehrer Heinrich Himmler

SS-Oberstgruppenfuehrer Sepp Dietrich. The picture was taken in 1944, when Dietrich was still in the rank of Obergruppenführer

Obergruppenführer Heinrich Gille. The picture was taken before 1944.

SS soldiers in battle

armies visited Berlin. In any case, the Führer and the High Command demanded the utmost caution and the strictest secrecy. Under these conditions, the soldiers and officers of the "fresh" SS Panzer divisions could not even be allowed close (for the time being) to the front line. But all this secrecy was broken when the transport services of Army Group South transmitted a message that a large military unit had arrived in the Raab area. At that moment, the headquarters of the army group, in fact, still did not know anything, and therefore they immediately asked the High Command: "At 17 hours 55 minutes, the 1st staff officer, Lieutenant Colonel Germani, reported that parts of a large strategic formation were arriving in the Raab area. Lieutenant Colonel Germani explained that the first, not the largest tactical unit, was able to successfully unload from the echelon, but the second one was not yet, since he did not have any order for this, agreed with the Fuhrer. Recall that at that moment it was officially announced that only 1 SS Panzer Corps had been transferred to Army Group South. As you can see, the 11th SS Panzer Corps could not even unload without an order from Hitler. On February 1, at 2:30 a.m., a message arrived at the headquarters of the army group that the 6th Panzer Army, as part of both SS Panzer Corps, was at the disposal of Wöhler.

Only at that moment did it become clear to the command of the army group what forces were sent to participate in the new offensive operation. The information received by telephone at night was confirmed by an official "lightning" telegram at 16:00. "In addition to [the SS Panzer Corps, the Army Group South, as a reserve of the High Command of the Ground Forces, is assigned to the II SS Panzer Corps as part of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" and the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen". The command of the army group must immediately place the arriving units, just as it was done with the [SS Panzer Corps].

At 6 pm on February 1, 1945, the headquarters of Army Group South reported to the High Command which units had arrived and unloaded:

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- Headquarters of the SS Abschnitt "South" (maintenance personnel: command of the 1st SS Panzer Corps);

- ersatz-team "T" (five echelons with a tank regiment, one echelon with headquarters; 1st SS Panzer Division);

e ersatz command "No" (part of the reconnaissance battalion; 12th SS Panzer Division);

ÿ Nord training unit (maintenance personnel, 2nd SS Panzer Division).

That is, it was about 8 - 9 eshe - Werner Ostendorf, one of the wombs. commanders of the SS division "Reich" As the train arrived

NOV WITH SSEC DIVISIONS, it was ordered to create special units from the anti-aircraft units accompanying them, which would be engaged in air defense of oil refineries located to the east of Komarom. In addition, the High Command reminded that, in view of the alleged Soviet offensive near the Gran, one of the arriving formations should be sent to the northern bank of the Danube. This was quite logical, since a change in positions on the northern bank of the Danube would not allow the effective use of tank formations in the coastal zone of Komarom, which is very inconvenient for such troops.

However, a little later, Hitler insisted that the tank divisions should be deployed south of the Raab, that is, on the southern bank of the Danube. The strengthening of the German positions near the Gran had to be carried out at the expense of other units.

This order was somewhat modified, since Army Group South considered that "there are objective reasons why these tank formations should be deployed north of the Raab, including a small

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island". This was not yet a change in strategic positions on the banks of the Danube, but a clear preparation for this. Gradually, the command of the 8th Army began to be involved in the preparation of this operation. |

The arrival of tank units in Hungary was more like a "secret infiltration". It went very slowly, under the cover of night. This was caused by all the same air raids by allied and Soviet aviation. Despite the fact that the preparations for the operation bore little resemblance to energetic actions, this circumstance had its positive moment for the Germans. The arrival of a large tank army in Hungary was hidden from Soviet intelligence for a long time. Naturally, through agents (in particular, among the local population), Soviet intelligence became aware that some tank units were arriving, but no one could even imagine that, literally, a whole tank army could be transferred from the west to Hungary. |

In the meantime, Hitler personally wanted to take control of Operation Icebreaker. For this reason, he ordered the commander of the 2nd Panzer Army, General of Artillery de Angelis, to arrive in Berlin. On February 2, 1945, the general ended up at the Fuhrer's Headquarters. In addition to him, a little later, the commander of Army Group South and representatives of the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces turned up at Headquarters. All of them were supposed to participate in the discussion of further operations carried out on the territory of Hungary. General Wöhler flew to Berlin on 7 February. However, before General de Angelis went there, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army and the command of Army Group South agreed on the "general direction of their actions." As a result, a plan was worked out, which both generals were to try to approve in Berlin. |

Firstly, they wanted to get into their hands the command of units not only of Army Group South, but also of Army Group F (Commander-in-Chief in the South-East). Secondly, if the army group Balka did not take part in these operations, then the 2nd Panzer Army should at least count on its operational-mobile units.

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Thirdly, for more accurate artillery fire, the advancing units needed at least one AIR division (artillery instrumental reconnaissance). Theoretically, these were rather modest desires, especially considering that Hungary became Hitler's theater of operations No. 1. The German command assessed the prospects for the upcoming Icebreaker operation quite positively. In response to the demand to provide the 2nd Panzer Army with "operational mobile units", Hitler demanded that the Wehrmacht High Command transfer from Italy (Commander in Chief in the South-West) the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer SS". Already at 8:30 on February 3, she went on the march. It was assumed that this mechanized SS division would arrive in the area of Nagykanizsa (Gross Canis), where it would temporarily serve as a reserve of the High Command of the Ground Forces. There the division was to receive reinforcements. To maintain secrecy, the SS division "Reichsführer" was referred to in almost all documents as the "reinforcement group of the 13th SS Mountain Division "Khanjar". This name was used for her during all two weeks while she was transferred from Italy to Hungary. Such a slow transfer this time was explained not by the actions of the Soviet and allied aviation, but by the active sorties of the Italian and Yugoslav partisans. In addition, it was impossible to disregard the obvious lack of coal for the echelons, to which, in fact, this division was transferred. Measures to maintain secrecy and camouflage were repeated from time to time. Feb 5

Commander of the 16th SS division "Reichsführer" SS Oberführer ral at 16 hours 5 minutes Verkhov Otto Baum land command

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troops issued an order to "all ersatz teams and training units of the SS" (this is how the SS Panzer divisions began to be called) to maintain complete radio silence. By the way, it is still unclear why this. the order was not given immediately. However, this order was largely redundant, since the command of the 6th SS Panzer Army gave the order to maintain radio silence even during the withdrawal from the Western Front. So for the SS tankers, such precautions were self-evident.

Despite Hitler's orders not to make any regular entries in the war diary, but only to keep his own, highly classified documents, references to SS Panzer divisions constantly appear in the combat diary of Army Group South. However, references are made exclusively under "code names". To make it easier for the reader to understand what is happening, here is a list of the "code names" used in the combat log.

The headquarters of the 1st SS Panzer Corps - the headquarters of the abschnitt! SS South.

1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" - SS ersatz team "Totenkopf".

12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" - ersatz command of the SS "Viking".

That is, the tank units of the 1st SS Panzer Corps were disguised in the documents as spare parts [At the SS Panzer Corps.

Headquarters P of the SS Panzer Corps - training headquarters "South".

2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" - training unit of the SS "Nord".

9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" - training unit of the SS "South".

Tabschnitt (from German literally - "section") is one of the main units in the territorial structure of the SS. In terms of numbers, it corresponded approximately to an army brigade. The headquarters of the abschnitt included: the commander, the chief of staff, the personal assistant of the commander and

adjutant, as well as assistants for training, organizational issues, social security, sports, press relations, air defense and chemical defense assistants, legal adviser and house manager.

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As you can see, the II SS Panzer Corps was disguised as training units.

The 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" is a reinforcement group of the 13th SS Mountain Division "Khanjar".

The command of the 6th SS Panzer Army, which arrived on the eve of the start of the offensive, was referred to in the documents as the "High Sapper Command of Hungary".

All orders were given by the command of the army and the army group, strictly following the established "code names".

If we talk about the deployment of SS Panzer divisions, then the places allocated for this at first turned out to be too small. Almost everywhere they already housed the supply and communications services that were part of the Balka army group. In some of these places there were combat units. As more and more tank trains arrived in Hungary, the deployment of SS tankers became more and more problematic. For this reason, the command of both corps demanded that the command of Army Group South take appropriate measures. On February 6, 1945, the location of the incoming SS Panzer divisions was extended south to west. This was immediately notified to the High Command of the Ground Forces. In the divisions themselves, close attention was paid to ensuring that the first arriving echelons (especially with tank units) were deployed as far east as possible, that is, as close as possible (within acceptable limits) to the front. At the same time, they had to be placed extremely tightly, without significant "gaps" in their positions. The very same command of the 6th SS Panzer Army was to be located in the town of Gyorshövenhaz. From February 6, when moving through the territory of Hungary, officers had to close the numbers of their cars. A little later, this also affected trucks and tanks. Unprecedented precautions were taken. But, on the other hand, this measure was taken too late, since the area was literally "swarming" with Soviet intelligence officers and Soviet agents from among the Hungarian population. However, some of the German officers resorted to this measure immediately after unloading the equipment from the echelon.

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On February 7, units of the II SS Panzer Corps, still coming from the north, continued their arrival in Hungary. On that day, the High Command of the Ground Forces ordered that "the training unit of the SS Nord be transferred to the Komárom area in order to form a supply line behind the positions of the Feldherrnhalle tank corps on the segment between Komárom and Neuhäusel (Ershekuivar - Novezamki). And it was on this day that the "repeated order of the Führer" was born regarding the preservation of the strictest secrecy of the movement of both SS tank corps. Even the slightest violation of this order was to be punished by death.

In almost all divisional headquarters, a narrow circle of officers was formed who were supposed to monitor the observance of secrecy. In addition to the actual staff officers, communications officers also got here.

In those days, in the army group Balka and the 8th Army, behind whose positions the forces of the 6th SS Panzer Army were concentrated, relative calm reigned. The Soviet troops themselves were in dire need of a respite in order to replenish the units that took part in the fierce battles. However, the High Command of the Ground Forces believed that this lull would not last long. It was assumed that in the near future the Soviet troops would begin

another massive offensive into the Upper Hungarian valley on both sides of the Danube in order to break through to Vienna and Bratislava.

In order to fully meet these Soviet units, on February 8, 1945, the High Command gave the order to transfer three of the tank divisions assembled near Raab to the northern end of the Bakony Forest, in order to cover Komar and Neuhuysel.

In accordance with this order, the command of Army Group South issued an order to prepare for a possible defense. Army Group Balka and the 1st SS Panzer Corps were to occupy the so-called "positions of Clara", which passed through the bridgehead at Raab. The 8th Army and the II SS Panzer Corps were, as before, to be behind the positions of the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps. For

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ensuring unified leadership during the operation, the High Command prudently ordered the temporary subordination of the forces of the II Panzer Corps to the Feldherrnhalle command. At the same time, separate parts of the II SS Panzer Corps could be used on the bridgehead near Komar to defend oil refineries located on the southern bank of the Danube.

The order to march was announced. For half of the tank units, readiness for the march was 6 hours, for the second half - 36 hours.

At the same time, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army received an order to deploy the incoming 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" in conditions of maintaining the same utmost secrecy.

To protect the coal basin, located in the Tatabánya-Felsőgyalla region, the army group Balka was ordered to build defensive structures. For construction work, first of all, Hungarian and Slovak units, which were considered "unreliable soldiers," were to be involved. With all this, the pace of construction of fortifications was very slow.

After the failure of Operation Konrad 11, no active fighting took place on the front held by Army Group South. This also applied to Szekesfehérvár (southern flank), and the so-called "mountain front" (8th army), which already passed through the territory of Slovakia. Actually, German actions were limited to separate reconnaissance sorties, the purpose of which was information about the number and strength of Soviet troops. At the same time, the very command of Army Group South ordered the armies subordinate to it to save ammunition, primarily artillery shells. It was strictly forbidden to unnecessarily open fire on "calm" sectors of the front. Ammunition had to be accumulated for more important combat missions.

On February 10, after meetings at the Führer's Headquarters and at the headquarters of the High Command of the Ground Forces, General Wöhler returned from Germany. Almost immediately, he began to prepare to destroy the Soviet bridgehead to the north.

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west of the Gran. This operation was supposed to eliminate the threat of a Soviet breakthrough and the creation of new bridgeheads in the area of Komárom and Neuhuysel. In addition, this undertaking was supposed to cover the Danube flank of the positions of the Balka army group, and the front held by the 8th Army was to be significantly reduced.

As a result of the beginning of the movement of forces in the direction of the front, in the course of preparations for Operation South Wind, the exchange of information between the command of Army Group South and the headquarters of both SS tank corps increased significantly. In order to continue to maintain radio silence, several specially authorized

officers who were supposed to act as messengers. Similar officers existed under the very command of the army group.

Although the movement of the 6th Panzer Army was not very fast, it managed to avoid significant incidents and breakdowns during it. As a result, all units went to their original positions.

Chapter 5 PREPARATIONS FOR OPERATION SOUTH WIND

On February 10, 1945, an order came to the headquarters of the SS Panzer Corps. The chief of staff, at that time Obersturmbannführer Waffen-SS Lehmann, had to urgently arrive at the command post of Army Group South. At 7 o'clock on the same day, Lehmann received from Grolman all the necessary explanations and instructions. If we stick to the text of official documents, then the following was written in the combat log of Army Group South on February 10, 1945:

«After | the SS Panzer Corps will be put on alert, it should go to the positions of the 211th People's Grenadier Division. These forces, together with the 45th Infantry Division and the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division

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her "Masters of the Teutonic Order" should attack the enemy bridgehead, located northwest of Gran. The most likely is an offensive in the direction of Nemeth Sheldin - Dol Makash - Nana. At first, the offensive must be carried out by divisions subordinate to the command of the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps. Then units [of the tank corps] should go on the offensive, which will be subordinate to the headquarters of the Feldherrnhalle corps. The purpose of the operation is to eliminate the enemy bridgehead northwest of Gran. In the proper course of events, the enemy should be driven back from Gran and then destroyed to the east of the city. All this will force the enemy to withdraw part of his forces from Koenigsberg. The start of the offensive is scheduled for 16 February.

The chief of staff of the army group demands that the most combat-ready units [of the tank corps] be transferred east of Neuhausel by the night of February 13th. Units in need of replenishment must remain in their original positions. More detailed orders will be given to the Chief of Staff [SS Panzer Corps] later.”

As you can see, the operation itself has not yet been planned in detail. Yes, and the start date of the offensive was conditional. There was only a general plan - the destruction of the Soviet group of troops on the western bank of the Danube, which involved the notorious "big decision" approved by Hitler.

Exactly one day later, on February 11, at 17:00, a regular operational meeting was held at the headquarters of Army Group South. On it, in addition to the command of the army group, there were the commander of the [SS Panzer Corps Gruppenführer Priss, the chief of staff of the 8th Army, the commander of the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps and the oberkvartirmeister of the army group. They received not only written orders, but also verbal explanations.

The biggest problem in the forthcoming offensive was the transfer of Panther and Tiger tanks across the Danube. They could be thrown one by one over the road bridge in Komarom. However, this event

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would take a very long time. For this reason, the transport services of the army group received an order to prepare the transfer of tanks over the railway bridge in the same Komarom, that is, it was urgent to find the required number of echelons. Almost all those present at the meeting spoke in favor of such a solution to the problem. It significantly saved, firstly, time, and secondly, fuel. Literally the night before

(at 8 pm on February 10) the command of the 8th Army reported that the concentration of troops had begun for the implementation of Operation South Wind. It was supposed to last for five days. That is, the previously set date for the start of the operation, February 16, was confirmed.

And what did the Soviet troops do at that time? As early as February 3, German intelligence reported that "in the combat area north of the Danube ... there are no signs that an enemy offensive is being prepared in the near future." However, the command of the 8th Army informed the headquarters of the army group that from the intercepted Soviet radio message it followed that preparations for the offensive should begin on February 8th. No one could say whether it was a local action or another major Soviet operation. But in any case, it was a wake-up call. In response to this information, Colonel General Guderian demanded to strengthen the front in the Gran area. This required at least bringing anti-aircraft artillery closer to the front line, which could withstand Soviet tanks. At that time, the 88 mm anti-aircraft guns were too far away (8-10 kilometers from the front line) to be able to counter the Soviet tank breakthrough.

On February 4, information was received that the Soviet command had withdrawn at least two operational corps of the 6th Guards Tank Army from the southern flank of the German 8th Army. They were transferred to the sector of the front held by the Balka army group. And this could only mean one thing - the Soviet positions near the Gran were weakened. In this regard, the command of the 8th Army began to urgently plan an "offensive with the aim of eliminating or,

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at least reducing the enemy foothold northwest of the Gran. But when planning the operation, the opinion of the High Command had to be taken into account. The same, in turn, ordered that instead of two infantry divisions, only one, the 46th Infantry Division, be advanced to the bridgehead to Gran. The other, the 357th Infantry Division, was to be located in the operational rear of the 8th Army as a mobile reserve. Under these conditions, the command of the 8th Army, in agreement with the command of Army Group South, began to develop an offensive plan from the northwest and southeast. During this offensive, it was supposed to push the Soviet troops back to the Keobelkut-Dol Makash line in order to proceed with their later complete annihilation. However, the Soviet forces were not so small that the Germans could easily cope with this task. So, for example, only on the bridgehead near the Grand were several Soviet divisions. Taking into account the upcoming Soviet offensive, the headquarters of the army group decided not to delay the preparation of their own offensive.

While the commander of Army Group South, General Wöhler, was at Hitler's Headquarters, on February 7, the High Command of the Ground Forces ordered the transfer of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" to the area north of Komarom. At that time, the headquarters of the 8th Army still did not know anything about the participation in the upcoming operation [of the SS Panzer Corps, and therefore they planned the offensive without taking into account these forces.

German intelligence informed that the forces of the Soviet troops did not fundamentally change. But at the same time, Soviet intelligence officers were able to take as a language one Hungarian officer who served in the communications units. The Hungarians themselves swore that he had been captured by partisans. But the Germans were not inclined to believe this version. They also did not rule out the possibility that he himself voluntarily went over to the Soviet side. Such cases in those days were not isolated. In any case, no one knew what information he could pass on to Soviet intelligence and whether the Soviet troops had already begun to prepare retaliatory countermeasures.

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At that moment, the Germans did not yet have accurate information about the "Pliev operational army group" and the Soviet 6th Guards Tank Army. They could only guess at their tactical intentions. Anticipating a possible throw to the west, in the rear they have already begun

develop a plan for the evacuation of 130,000 civilians from the "Fortress Preusburg (Bratislava)". In Bratislava itself, a general mobilization began, but no decisive measures have yet been taken, since "it was not completely clear what forces the enemy had." On February 8, again, no new information was received. On the sector of the front held by the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps, as well as near the Gran, no major battles took place. The combatants seemed to be waiting for the right moment.

On the map at the headquarters of Army Group South, on the location of the Soviet troops, an inscription was made: "02/08/45. Agent: 2 infantry and 1 tank divisions are stationed here. An arrow was drawn from this inscription towards Gran. The German headquarters believed that such a concentration of Soviet troops "could allow them to calmly repel any of their offensives." On the same day, February 8, the general situation on the entire Hungarian sector of the front was discussed at the headquarters of the army group. The whole discussion could be reduced to the following three conclusions:

1) The Soviet command holds the most mobile units along the entire stretch from Lake Balaton to the Slovak mountains (in the south - Szekesfehervar, in the north - the Lower Tatras). Relative calm reigned throughout the entire sector of the front, which indicated that the Soviet units were receiving reinforcements and regrouping.

2) As soon as the regrouping of Soviet troops is completed, we can expect the resumption of massive and powerful offensives in the direction of Bratislava and Vienna.

3) The greatest concentration of Soviet troops is observed to the west of Budapest (3rd Ukrainian Front). In part, German intelligence has information about the Soviet units stationed there. According to the intercepted Soviet radiogram, from February 10, an offensive by the Red Army could be expected. The attack on this particular site

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ke (west of the Hungarian capital) favored the start of the German operation near the Gran.

In response to this forecast, the High Command of the Ground Forces issued an order to strengthen the defense in the indicated sectors of the front and postpone the event, which was called in the documents "transfer of three SS Panzer divisions from the reserve of the High Command." That is, the divisions urgently had to move to their original positions. The transfer of the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" from Italy to Nagykanizsa was also to be accelerated.

The operational headquarters of the Wehrmacht also became interested in the information provided. During its discussion, the following verdict was issued: "The 8th Army is fighting local battles. But soon a blow is expected in the direction of Bratislava and Vienna. It remains unclear whether the offensive will be carried out through Budapest or north of the Gran. A simultaneous attack on the positions of the 2nd Panzer Army is expected.

The forecast turned out to be not only inaccurate, but also fundamentally wrong. In the meantime, Soviet troops were 120 kilometers from Bratislava. It seemed obvious that the Soviet command was focused on recapturing the environs of Szekesfehervar from the Germans, followed by a strike through the Slovak mountains.

In the above discussion, the following decision was made regarding Operation South Wind:

"1) Given the terrain, the spearhead of the offensive should be on the positions of the 21st Infantry Division. The blow must be delivered in a southerly direction between Vel Ludnice and Ket (1st phase of the operation).

2) Then, the forces of the tank units will carry out a breakthrough to the river on both sides of Dol Makash (2nd phase of the operation). At the same time, it was necessary to avoid the heights located around

Sharkan, so that the right, more powerful wing of the offensive, turned southeast to Perkan (3rd phase of the operation).

3) At the same time, the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division was to strike south east on

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board, to Sheldin, in order to eventually take Köbelkut and block the supply routes of the Soviet units. Due to the expected flank actions of the Red Army (anti-tank artillery) from the forests north-west of Koebölkut, as well as near Sheldin, it is fundamental to refuse to use tank equipment in this sector of the front.

4) The command of the 8th Army should request an artillery reinforcement. In agreement with the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces, the 403rd People's Artillery Corps can be sent here.

5) Army Group Balka, operating on the south bank of the Danube, is to support the attack on the north bank by firing artillery at the Soviet positions across the river. With a corresponding development of events, it should support the offensive by crossing the Danube with some units and creating its own bridgehead in the rear of the Soviet troops.

6) The armored vehicles of the 1st SS Panzer Corps must be brought to their starting positions by rail.

7) Issuing written orders to prepare for an offensive is strictly prohibited.

8) Finally, the 2nd Panzer Division "Reich" should be transferred to the area between Komar and Neuhusel. If successful on the north bank of the Danube, it should be ready to start operating on the south bank.

A specific date for the offensive was not determined, but it was envisaged that it was supposed to begin around February 16-17.

The commander-in-chief in the southeast was to launch an offensive over the next few days along the Drava River, just south of Barcha. Now Hitler was thinking about how to win back the indicated territories from the Red Army as soon as possible. To do this, the right wing of the 2nd Panzer Army was to join the divisions advancing through the Drava. He was to begin active operations on the Barch-Nagyatad front. The army was given almost the key role in the operation on the southern flank. It is for this reason that it must urgently provide

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all plans indicating time calculations and forces used. General de Angelis, not devoid of a number of doubts, nevertheless reacted almost instantly. The swampy area of the Drava stood out as a particularly unfavorable factor for the German offensive. Then, as the same factor, the slowness of the "right neighbor" (the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast), who did everything possible to prevent this operation from taking place, was indicated. In addition, the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" transferred to the reserve of the High Command of the Ground Forces urgently needed rest and significant replenishment.

The movement [of the SS Panzer Corps, as well as the regrouping of the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps, began on February 12, 1945. At the same time, Hitler resolutely rejected the request to involve the 403rd People's Artillery Corps in this operation. He was to remain on the south bank of the Danube. Army Group "South" in these conditions had to do with the redeployment of other, smaller ones at its disposal.

artillery units. On the night of February 13, the unloading of trains carrying equipment [of the SS Panzer Corps. However, the arrival of both SS Panzer divisions was not uniform. Moreover, the trains were loaded in a hurry, which made it difficult for them to move. Part of the trains that were supposed to be in place had long ago been taken out of Raab to the east. To remedy the situation, it was urgently necessary to pull up trains from the west.

The situation was at least somehow corrected by the trains standing on the sidings, which delivered the 6th SS Panzer Army from Berlin via Vienna. This time, taking into account the past sad experience, the location of the headquarters of the hotel divisions was entrusted to Army Group South, which was better oriented on the ground. The most powerful task force of the 6th SS Panzer Army was located on a manor near Győršovenház, a town located 20 kilometers west of Raab.

It was on February 13 that the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast finally handed over to the command of the army group

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"South" your plan of action. At the same time, he did not hide his doubts as to whether it was worth using the 2nd Panzer Army in this operation. He generally believed that it was too late to carry out this operation, since more than five Bulgarian divisions were concentrated on the northern bank of the Drava. However, all these objections had an effect on the High Command of the Wehrmacht, since on the same day at 16 hours 10 minutes, Major General Gehlen reported that the operation was in danger of failure. As in most cases when a major offensive was planned, a serious struggle began in the German military authorities and various headquarters for reinforcements and reinforcements. Each division, each army tried to "start" from the most advantageous positions. Hungary in February 1945 was no exception. Both the command of the Panzer Corps "Feldherrnhalle" and the command of the 8th Army constantly bombarded the headquarters of the army group with requests to provide them with parts of infantry and artillery reinforcements. It is worth noting that the thaw that had been prevailing in Hungary for several days had turned almost all of its expanses into endless swamps, so that the use of even caterpillar vehicles, not to mention ordinary trucks, seemed doubtful. In the end, everyone said in unison that the operation was supposed to be "a purely infantry enterprise, supported by powerful artillery fire."

Knowing about Hitler's ban on the transfer of the 403rd People's Artillery Corps, the headquarters of the army group promised the command of the Feldherrnhalle corps that they would be given the 959th artillery brigade from the reserve of the High Command for the offensive. But at the same time, the headquarters decisively refused to allow the 8th Army to use the 153rd field training division for the offensive, which served as the main source of all reinforcements on this sector of the front.

The headquarters did not want to step on the same rake. The fact is that this division, on the orders of Hitler, was already used in battles in December 1944. At that time, the headquarters of the Army Group "South" did not yet know that the "source" was replenished

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The division of front-line units "dry out" — Hitler signed an order to transform the field training division into a regular one, and therefore, it was to be used in battles at the front.

The thaw that had begun considerably slowed down the transfer of tank divisions. On February 13, it was reported from the 8th Army and the headquarters of Army Group "South" that "it is possible that the offensive will have to be postponed for one day." Ge-German tank columns are preparing for Neral Lieutenant Grolm en operation "South Wind". sent the message immediately

Major General Gelen.

At that time, the reconnaissance of the 8th Army managed to find out which Soviet forces were supposed to resist it in the upcoming offensive:

"We proceed from the fact that in the depths of the bridgehead there are forces supported by tanks [At the guards mechanized corps, while to the east of the Gran there are parts of two operational corps of the 6th guards tank army, the IX guards mechanized and the guards tank corps. With the outbreak of hostilities, it is very likely that these formations will also receive units of Pliev's army as reinforcements. The offensive will have to be launched in conditions of concentration of all available infantry and tank units, which will be supported by the transferred [SS tank corps, which, however, will lead to a weakening of positions on the remaining sectors of the front. The offensive is supposed to begin on day X at 5 o'clock in the morning with a powerful artillery bombardment of the enemy's positions in the northern sector of his bridgehead near Gran. A concentrated strike will allow him to recapture the environs of Nana, Kitsinda, Kemend, and Bina from him.

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The Feldherrnhalle tank corps, together with the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", will launch an offensive in the northeastern sector. The 46th Infantry Division is to take Vel Ludince, the 211th Infantry Division the vicinity of Ket, and the Panzer Group of the Feldherrnhalle Corps the vicinity of Farnal. In the area of Nemet-Sheldin and Bart, the enemy will be attacked from two flanks. The heights south and southeast of Nemeth Sheldin, as well as part of the river near Bart, are under heavy cover of enemy infantry and anti-tank artillery, which must be destroyed by the forces of [SS Panzer Corps. To do this, you need to go to them from the south. The offensive must be carried out quickly and unexpectedly. To do this, [the SS Panzer Corps, even on the night before the offensive, will be located on the strategic bridgehead between Neuhausen and just east of Nagyshurani. From there he will go to his original positions northwest of Farnad. In the second push, he must move the epicenter of the battle to the heights lying east of Kebelkut, in order to subsequently create tactical prerequisites for an offensive in the direction of the Gran. Fighting in Kebelkut itself should be avoided, but it should be taken by blocking the enemy forces from the southeast.

Then [the tank corps, supported by infantry units, should attack on the Musla-Bela segment. At the same time, the infantry has the task of taking residential quarters located on the eastern and southeastern heights. After that, they must take possession of Libad and Belaya. As soon as the command comes from the Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps, the divisions must go on the defensive to repel the enemy counteroffensive.

In addition, the following "parallel" events were envisaged:

"a) On the eve of the offensive, the 271st People's Grenadier Division, together with several duty units, should occupy a small bridgehead along the Danube near Gran, thereby misleading the enemy about the actual place where the offensive began.

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b) A reinforced regimental group from Army Group Balka should, on the first night after the start of the offensive, establish a bridgehead on the other side of the Danube, southwest of the Gran. This will make it possible to establish a direct link between the units fighting both to the north and immediately to the west of the Gran.

From a tactical point of view, the 1st Panzer Corps must follow the instructions of the command of the 8th Army. But at the same time, both SS tank corps will continue to operate independently, not subordinating to each other."

The last indication seemed to be taken for granted. It found a mention in the combat diary, most likely because the two divisions of the 1st SS Panzer Corps were operating at too great a distance from each other, while the Feldherrnhalle corps

continued to be a "clenched fist". This circumstance, of course, immediately caused a lot of complaints from the command of the 6th SS Panzer Army. In any case, at 6 p.m., the Army Group sent a telegram to the High Command of the Ground Forces that it was ready to launch Operation South Wind.

In the meantime, the headquarters of the [SS Panzer Corps] reported on the results of reconnaissance concerning the possibility of an offensive along the Komárom-Neuhäusel line. The command of the 8th Army supplemented this information with an assessment of the terrain, which reported on "possible difficulties in using tank equipment due to the onset of a thaw and, as a result, swamping or complete flooding of the coastal lowlands." But at the same time, the headquarters of the tank corps itself twice (at 10 and 12 o'clock) informed that "the offensive under any circumstances should have begun on February 17 at 5 o'clock in the morning." At the same time, the headquarters also reported on the increased activity of Soviet aviation in the Grana area, suggesting that urgent aerial reconnaissance of positions was carried out there. The German pilots themselves were able to see about 25 Soviet tanks concentrated in the northwestern section of the bridgehead near Leva. Following this, the command of the 8th Army received an order to report before February 15, "ka

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some additional measures were taken to prevent an enemy offensive in the area of Leva during the operation "South Wind". Almost immediately, the answer was that 30 units of armored vehicles had been assigned to prepare a distracting offensive maneuver to the north of Rybnik. At the same time, it was agreed that this "false" offensive would begin only if a Soviet attack was actually launched near Leva.

At the same time, the headquarters of the army group from the army group Balka was informed that on the evening of the first day of the offensive, the most powerful regimental group of the 96th Infantry Division (the "Signal" group) would be transferred to the northern bank of the Danube. "It should create a bridgehead, presumably in the vicinity of Abad, if by that time the advanced units of the 8th Army manage to occupy the territory of the bridgehead near the so-called Paris Canal." If the offensive had been carried out at a less rapid pace, then "the army group would have waited for darkness to carry out its own operation." At the headquarters of Army Group South, they traditionally relied on the effect of surprise, but at the same time they preferred to inform the headquarters of the 8th Army about the plans of the Army Group Balka. The command of the 8th Army in response drew attention to the fact that "aerial photography of the vicinity of the Paris Canal and the bridgehead northeast of the Grand showed that due to the thaw, flooding and flooding of a number of areas have become a significant obstacle that can very significantly slow down offensive development.

But at the same time, the attack of the Signal combat group was prepared so well (from the point of view of the Germans) that it could begin at any moment - it was only necessary to give the appropriate order. However, an advance by daylight could incur heavy casualties in the group, and so Balk continued to insist on its use at night or late in the evening, even if this would slow down its advance by a day.

In this situation, the position of the command of the 6th SS Panzer Army is interesting, which remained a kind of "silent authority" and in fact did not take part in the planning of Operation South Wind. similar polo

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The situation did not suit the Chief of Staff of the 6th Army, Major General of the Waffen-SS Kremer. Using his daily contacts with the command of Army Group South, he tried to influence the planning of the upcoming military operation, in which he was not satisfied with a lot. First, he was embarrassed that the tank army would be divided. Secondly, he considered it unacceptable to throw into battle not yet fully equipped units. Thirdly, he focused on the "big decision" that was prescribed by Hitler, and not at all on local

operations in the Grana area. He considered the participation of new SS Panzer Divisions in Operation South Wind dangerous, if only because it would completely disavow the fact that there were SS Panzer Corps in Hungary. Their participation in not the largest military operations would put an end to all the disguise that the German tankers had carefully preserved since Frankfurt an der Oder. In the very first days of the fighting, it would have become clear to the Soviet command that, despite all the code names, the 1st SS Panzer Corps was by no means near Berlin, but in Hungary. You didn't have to be a great sage to understand that somewhere nearby was the II SS Panzer Corps, which was part of the same 6th Panzer Army. But these objections of the SS general had no effect on the army ranks. Actually, the headquarters of Army Group South had no choice - it was bound hand and foot by Hitler's order. Everything had to go according to the already agreed plan.

On the night of February 15-16, that is, the day before the start of Operation South Wind, a tank group from the Feldherrnhalle corps launched a "false" offensive northwest of Loew. The reinforced regimental group of the 271st People's Grenadier Division supporting this offensive was able to gain a foothold almost immediately on the eastern bank of the Gran River (not to be confused with the city), cutting the railway line that connected the positions of the 2nd Ukrainian Front with the Left, Timats and Kozmalovets. To suppress the Soviet counterattacks undertaken in the morning, many German aircraft were thrown into action.

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In the meantime, the army group Balka decided to transfer under the Gran an air defense battery at their disposal from the 15th anti-aircraft artillery division. We mention this fact only to show how "small" Bulk's style of command became after he failed to successfully carry out any of the "Konrad" operations. By February 1945, other people were already influencing the command of Army Group South (it should not be forgotten that the "legendary" Sepp Dietrich, "Hitler's gladiator," had not yet arrived in Hungary). And Balk himself was concerned about far from grandiose strategic tasks. He was worried that a large flood wave (about 3.5 meters high) was moving along the Danube, which was supposed to reach his position in the next few hours. Naturally, this significantly hampered the advance of the Signal combat group.

But this did not prevent preparations for the start of Operation South Wind. It seemed that preparations for it went like clockwork. In this situation, even a unique event happened - it was decided to postpone the offensive an hour earlier. However, the mood of the command of the Army Group "South" "spoiled" the flood, which turned the neighborhood of the Paris Canal into an impenetrable slurry. As a result, it was decided that the tank units would be used more actively during the offensive in the western direction.

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Chapter 6 OPERATION SOUTH WIND

1 February 7, 1945 (Saturday). First day of Operation South Wind

"Temperature 5 'Above zero. Generally cloudless, clear in places. Only specially fortified highways are passable. The rest of the roads are passable only for caterpillar vehicles, wheeled vehicles everywhere get stuck in the mud."

As planned, at 4 o'clock in the morning, during the so-called "thieves' time", the infantry divisions of the Feldherrnhalle tank corps attacked the Soviet bridgehead

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under Gran. All headquarters, from the headquarters of the German divisions to the General Staff of the Ground Forces, eagerly awaited reports of the first results of the offensive. About how the German command counted on the success of this operation,

can be judged from the entries in the combat log of Army Group South. The plots associated with the Gran in this document turned into a kind of epic narrative, which began with the success of the Soviet troops in the early days of January 1945, unsuccessful counterattacks throughout the entire month and, it would seem, the attenuation of the fighting on this sector of the front. If we turn to the fate of the 20th Panzer Division, which tried to "settle the situation near Gran", we find that after replenishment it was transferred to the northeast, to the Army Group Center. The situation in the 6th Soviet Guards Tank Army was not very favorable either. During the winter battles, she also lost many tanks, and therefore needed reinforcements. Even at the end of January 1945, it seemed that the fighting near the Gran had died down. But nevertheless, large Soviet forces were pulled up to this bridgehead. The Red Army was preparing to strike a decisive blow. The headquarters of the Army Group "South" understood the danger looming over this sector of the front. The command assessed the situation as follows:

"The calm that reigns in the bridgehead under the Gran cannot hide the fact that it has been and will continue to be the center of attraction for Soviet troops who intend to break into the valley of Upper Hungary. As soon as the enemy strike units, which suffered heavy losses in past battles, are replenished, the enemy will once again resume attempts to carry out his strategic plan - to break through on both banks of the Danube to Bratislava, which would open the way for him to Vienna. As long as the enemy bridgehead under the Gran is not liquidated, the army group will always be forced to maintain large reserves on the northern bank of the Danube. If this danger is eliminated, then Army Group South will regain freedom of action to the south.

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on the bank of the Danube. The breakthrough of the enemy on the northern bank of the Danube, carried out in early January, proved that we are not in a position to use all available forces to defeat the enemy near Budapest.

But back to February 17th. The notorious thaw turned the recently frozen ground into a mess. The Paris Canal, which in frosty conditions did not present any difficulties for the Germans to cross, after the flood turned into a powerful natural barrier that could be overcome only with a lot of effort. But even this required preliminary thorough preparation. The Germans were well aware that the Soviet command would not fail to take advantage of the advantages gained in order to keep in their hands an advantageous strategic foothold. Now the Germans had to break through not only through the notorious anti-tank barriers, covered from the flanks by Soviet artillery. If we talk about the climatic conditions of the use of German tanks, then in this situation they were the most unfavorable. But the command of the army group had already taken into account past mistakes, and therefore the tanks had to go into battle, covered from the flanks by the German infantry.

As expected, the offensive came as a complete surprise to the Soviet command. The 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" almost instantly managed to break through the Soviet defense line west of Mag. With the support of a tank group from the Feldhernnhalle corps, the German grenadiers rushed to Nemeth-Scheldin. Soldiers of the 46th Infantry Division, which found itself in the epicenter of the battle, were moving in the same direction. By 8 o'clock in the morning they reached the "cherished" settlement.

In those hours, the 211th Volksgrenadier Division fought fierce battles on both sides of Barth. [The SS Panzer Corps advanced from their original positions northwest of Farnad. He rushed into

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German offensive at the Gran. Hungarian peasant shows the way

"break" made by the 46th Infantry Division in the Soviet line of defense. But very soon the rosy mood of the German command began to disappear. It turned out that the units of the Red Army prepared quite well for the defense of these territories, creating powerful defensive lines in places. By noon, neither the 46th Infantry Division nor the tanks of the SS Corps had been able to break through the line of anti-tank barriers near Nemet Scheldin. Stuck in the battles near Barth and the 211th People's Grenadier Division. Several hours passed, and its soldiers could not recapture a single meter of land from the Red Army. The Soviet command, taught by past bitter experience, especially the Konrad operations, began to urgently prepare retaliatory measures. Already on the afternoon of February 17, German air reconnaissance discovered significant concentrations of Soviet troops in Kitsinda, Kemenda, and Palda. All these units of the Red Army were rapidly moving towards the Gran. Only a whole mechanized column (more than 50 vehicles) rushed to Bina. Fearing that the offensive would stall, and not having time to start, the command of Army Group South connected the 4th Air Fleet to Operation South Wind. The Luftwaffe pilots tried to constantly attack the Soviet columns moving towards the front line.

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The outcome of this battle largely depended on whether the Red Army men had time to build defensive lines along the banks of the Paris Canal, or whether the Germans had time to force this water barrier earlier. By the evening of February 17, units of the 46th Infantry Division and [SS Panzer Corps (the main striking forces in this operation) were still able to approach the Paris Canal in several places. But then a "surprise" awaited them - all the bridges across this overflowing river turned out to be prudently blown up. Almost immediately, it was decided to try to cross the river after dark. For this reason, the command of the 8th Army reported to the headquarters of the army group that "even today it intends to create offensive bridgeheads on the banks of the Paris Canal." Therefore, the command had to induce the Balk army group in the shortest possible time "to form a bridgehead on the northern bank of the Danube near Ebed with the forces of the regimental group."

However, Balk, in his usual manner, considered it necessary to note that the prerequisites for forcing the Danube had not yet been formed, namely, the advancing units not only did not create bridgeheads on the banks of the Paris Canal, but were not even able to gain a foothold on their "own", northern bank of the river. . At the same time, Balk himself pointed out that when the advancing units were able to overcome the Soviet defensive line stretching from Libad to Musla, he would immediately give the order to the 96th Infantry Division to advance across the Danube.

Meanwhile, German field artillery was brought up to the Danube, which from the southern bank of the Danube fired on Soviet positions in Naney Kamp Darmoty. Late in the evening, the command of Army Group South was confident that around 11 p.m. the Paris Canal had been forced in two places, that is, two small German bridgeheads had been created. This information was supported by information that a ford was discovered in the Paris Canal northeast of Köbölkut, along which tanks could freely move to the other side. |

Everything indicated that the 96th Infantry Division was to launch an assault on the northern bank of the Danube in the Ebed area.

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At 11:45 p.m., the strike battalion of the "Signal" combat group, without encountering any significant Soviet resistance, landed on the northern coast, thus creating a foothold for the transfer of the entire regimental group.

Literally half an hour earlier, General Wehler reported to Guderian: "The greatest prospects open up in connection with the offensive across the Danube of the 96th Infantry Division. For the time being, the enemy is limited only to gathering forces in order to create a new defensive line." Meanwhile, the concentration of Soviet troops took place not only on the northern, but also on the southern bank of the Danube. Marshal Tolbukhin wanted to return such an important strategic object as the city

Székesfehérvár. Anticipating such a development of events, the command of the army group Balka created in this area from the 1st and 3rd tank divisions a kind of mobile operational reserve.

On a small "distracting" bridgehead near Rybník, Balka's army group, of course, failed to achieve any results. However, the Soviet troops failed to liquidate it. But he continued to be constantly attacked from all sides. It is possible that the Soviet command considered a breakthrough in this direction much more dangerous than the reduction or elimination of the bridgehead near Gran. Active attacks by Soviet troops under- the left wing of the 8th Army, located in the Lower Tatra, was also thrown. Units of the Red Army in several places even succeeded in successfully developing the offensive. As a result, the command of the 8th Army, in order to "patch up" the breakthrough, had to throw the last reserves into battle.

In the evening, an order came to the headquarters of the army group from the Headquarters of the Führer that from now on both tank corps are subordinate exclusively to the command of the 6th tank army. However, as an exception, until the end of Operation South Wind, it was decided that the 1st Tank Corps would be in the supply of the 8th Army. Already from this reservation it was clear that the German command believed that the operation "South Wind" would soon end with "the victory of German weapons".

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February 18, 1945 (Sunday). Second day of Operation South Wind

"Light frost at night. During the day the temperature is up to 6 °C above zero. Slight cloudiness. Partly sunny. The condition of the roads is unchanged compared to the previous day."

On the night of February 17-18, the Germans managed to gain a foothold in several places on the southern, "Soviet" bank of the Paris Canal. This is how bridgeheads were created, which were to become the base for the continuation of the offensive [of the SS Panzer Corps].

Much further north, Soviet attacks continued to be repulsed by the left wing of the 8th Army. In the south, the Red Army again attacked the positions of the 1st SS Panzer Corps near Lake Velence. The counterattacks launched by the SS ended in failure. The headquarters of the Army Group "South" reacted very painfully to this information. They demanded to keep the coast of the lake by any means.

On the other sectors of the front held by Army Group South, there were no major hostilities. That is, without much risk, the Germans could continue their offensive against the Soviet bridgehead on the northern bank of the Danube.

The offensive of the Feldherrnhalle tank corps and the Staubwasser divisional combat group, which was adjacent to it from the south, led to the seizure of territory on both sides of the village of Batorkesi. The Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" was able not only to advance through the snow-covered forests north of Batorkesi, but also to storm Köbölkút. The capture of this settlement was facilitated by the fact that it was attacked from two sides by the forces of the tank group of the Feldherrnhalle corps. The Germans were confidently advancing in a southeasterly direction towards Béla.

1st SS Panzer Corps, covered by the motorized infantry of the Hitler Youth division, which was part of it, was able to overcome the Paris Canal. The SS units took control of the rugged, sparsely wooded terrain to the east of Köbölkút. Here they had to engage in battle with the fiercely resisting units of the Red Army.

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Army. But due to the fact that all bridges across the river were destroyed, pulling up German tanks to the battlefield was delayed. The SS division "Leibstandarte" was able to expand its positions

her bridgehead at Sharkan, which allowed her to try to continue her offensive in a southerly direction, towards Musla.

With the heavy artillery at the disposal of the 46th Infantry Division, it continued its advance eastwards in the afternoon. She had to break the resistance of the Red Army units dug in on the heights near Libad. The 211th People's Grenadier Division, located a little to the north on the left flank, despite all the expectations of the German command, did not manage to take Bart. Parts of the Red Army more and more often tried to go over to counterattacks. At some moments it seemed that the people's grenadier division was about to pass from the offensive to the defense. Soviet aviation joined the suppression of the German offensive. Bombers and attack aircraft brought down fire on the advanced units of the Germans. The German fighters, who were concentrated in the sky over the Gran and at the bridge in Bun, could not oppose anything to the "red falcons". They could hardly cope with their tasks even in the main places of their concentration.

Until that moment, Soviet troops were trying to build a new defensive line, which was supposed to pass along the line Bart - Libad - the coast of the Danube. Unexpectedly for the Germans, the 4th Guards Mechanized Corps "showed up" in Barth. However, this only confirmed the assumption of the German command that the 6th Guards Tank Army was still on the northern bank of the Danube. As the German offensive developed, the oncoming movement of Soviet troops to the northwest became more lively. But it was still too early to talk about the transfer of large fresh military formations. So far, the breakthrough was supposed to be liquidated by the forces of the already fighting Soviet units, which were thrown from under the city of Ipolshag, located further in the east. Reflection by the forces of the Red Army of all attacks of the 211th People's Grenadier Division

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The sightings aimed at Bart indicated that a Soviet counterattack in the area of the town of Bina should have been expected a little later. It was not excluded that a Soviet counterattack would be launched on both sides of this point. The headquarters of the 8th Army reported:

"The area between Bart and Bina can be considered as the center of future counterattacks and the most fierce resistance of the enemy. It was there that we encountered the most active actions of enemy aircraft. Obviously, a flank attack is planned from this area. It has not yet been established whether the enemy is withdrawing his units from the western section of the bridgehead, from Batorkesi.

But, inspired by the first successes of the offensive, the High Command of the Ground Forces hastily assumed that "the enemy will not be able to quickly throw into battle the forces at his disposal." Such a conclusion was motivated by the fact that for this the Soviet command would have needed to create a whole series of small bridgeheads, starting from the Gran and ending with the Ipel River.

German mortars firing from a captured Soviet trench

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For this reason, in order to continue the offensive, the command of the 8th Army ordered:

- 1) The offensive [of the SS Panzer Corps should be concentrated on Bela, which would subsequently allow an attack on Musla.
- 2) The offensive of the 46th Infantry Division should pass along both banks of the Paris Canal in an easterly direction, in order to then take the heights east of Libad and west of Kemend.
- 3) The 211th People's Grenadier Division should temporarily go on the defensive near Bart, which will allow it to prepare to repel the Soviet counteroffensive.

In the future, the command of the 8th Army considered the possibility of liquidating its own "false" bridgehead northwest of Leva, which would not only allow leveling the front line in this sector, but also free up several infantry battalions that were supposed to be sent as reinforcements to the 211th People's Grenadier Division, which "suffered heavy losses during the battles for Barth".

Towards noon, German sappers finished building crossings in several places across the Paris Canal. As a result, heavy tanks [of the SS Panzer Corps] rushed to the south coast. At the headquarters of the army group, it was considered that this was an excellent continuation of the offensive begun the day before. Moreover, the "Signal" battle group (regimental group of the 96th infantry division) managed to transfer 20 assault guns across the Danube that had emerged from the banks. All of them ended up on a bridgehead near Abed. Balk himself impatiently asked for the liquidation of the "Gransk bridgehead" to be completed as soon as possible, since he needed strength to implement his own strategic plans in the Vertesh mountains and near Felsjogalla. However, at that time, only the situation in the Barth area caused some concerns among the German command. But here, too, it was planned to "settle the situation" in the near future, for which it was supposed to transfer the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" in the vicinity of Barth. But she was supposed to storm Barth only after the Germans had captured Musla. Until that moment, the Hitler Youth division, like the entire 1st SS Panzer Corps, had to

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move in a southeasterly direction. At that time, no one would have dared to "unclench the tank fist." When the bridgehead of the Soviet troops was completely eliminated, the rest of the shock units could be thrown to storm Barth (SS division "Leibstandarte", 44th imperial grenadier division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", 46th infantry division).

But at some point, the command of Army Group South decided not to send the 46th Infantry Division to the south bank of the Paris Canal. Leaving it on the northern coast, the command intended to exclude the danger of Soviet attacks from the flanks from under Barth. Then, together with the infantrymen, part of the Feldherrnhalle tank corps was left in these positions.

By evening, new Soviet units began to enter the battle with the advancing Germans. So, for example, in the northwest of Grana Nana, a Soviet tank attack group was formed, which included 30 vehicles. The commander of the 8th Army at 19:45 reported to General Wehler: "It is surprising that the enemy has not yet formed powerful tank groups to defend the bridgehead. But it is possible that this information is simply not being passed on to us, since the warning system is very poorly set up in the advanced units of the SS. It is worth noting that almost immediately the chief of staff [of the tank corps] angrily, not without a touch of causticity, reacted to this reproach:

"The army group's war diary mentions the claim of the commander of the 8th Army about the poor communication and warning system that existed in the 1st SS Panzer Corps. The entry was made on February 18, that is, a day after the start of the offensive operation. But the commander himself made a telephone connection to himself only on the third day of the offensive. Our tank crews, on the other hand, were faced with the fact that army signalmen were laying lines completely in the wrong place where it was required. The head of the communications service of the 1st SS Panzer Corps was eventually forced to connect to the line: the nearby Feldherrnhalle Panzer Corps. Probably the commander of the 8th Army was outraged by this particular circumstance?

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The result of the second day can be summed up in one phrase: it was necessary to take Keibelkut as soon as possible and contact Signal in Ebed. If this happened, then the Germans could release significant forces to storm Barth. These are the tasks that were assigned to the advancing divisions for the next 24 hours. It is significant how badly the Germans were doing with the reserves. Two infantry battalions taken from near Leva became the object of an active

struggle. The command of Army Group South planned to send them to reinforce the 211th People's Grenadier Division. But Colonel General Guderian intended to send them to Slovakia, to Zvolen (Altsol). He believed that it was necessary to preserve the local industrial region by any means. In response, the headquarters of Army Group South requested permission from the High Command to transfer the 2nd SS Panzer Division Reich.

February 19, 1945 (Monday). Third day of Operation South Wind

"It's cold at night. During the day until 6 °C above zero. Generally sunny and clear. Unfortified roads begin to dry up.

This day became very favorable for the Germans. On the right flank of the offensive, they managed to break the resistance of the Soviet troops. Fearing encirclement, units of the Red Army left the territory bounded by the Danube and the Paris Canal. The battle group of Staubwasser, rapidly moving forward, occupied the territories between Buch and Batorkesi early in the morning. The 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" actually reached the Danube. Musla and Keobelkut were in her hands. The cleansing of the territory began. [The SS Panzer Corps, despite the Soviet air raids, was able to get to Gran. There he reached the foothold of the patch in Ebed, from where, in turn, the Signal combat group was moving towards Musla and Perkan. She captured not only the heights of Bela, but also Nana. The attack on Perkan was supported by the reconnaissance battalion of the 711th Infantry Division. The Germans entered Perkan at the same time from different sides. The 46th Infantry Division and the SS Panzer Divisions, acting together, captured Bela and Libad. But at the same time, they failed to develop the offensive and take the Dar from a raid.

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mot and Kemend. The Soviet troops continued to bravely hold out. They were blockaded in Barth and Darmot.

According to the order given near Barth, the 211th People's Grenadier Division went on the defensive. If Barth and Darmot are not taken into account, then on the northern bank of the Danube, Soviet troops continued to be active only in the sector of the front limited by Kertelesh and Gran. It was there that the artillery fire of Soviet guns did not subside. The Red Army was not going to leave these territories for a long time. The Soviet command intended to "take revenge" - a counteroffensive was being prepared. It was for this reason that the command of the Balka army group feared that the Soviet offensive on the Gran would begin through the Pilis Mountains. That is why Balk petitioned for the earliest possible return to the southern bank of the Danube of the Signal combat group. Especially since Abed was already relatively safe. But here the tactical interests of two armies clashed: the 8th and the 6th (army group Balka).

In addition, the ground dominance of the Germans near the Grand did not yet mean their dominance in the air. And here the Soviet pilots had an undoubted advantage. Knowing no problems with fuel, they "pecked" the advanced units of the 1st SS Panzer Corps without any difficulty, causing considerable damage to the German tankers. "Due to the fact that during the day the airspace in the triangle of Gran - Perkan - Musla was in the hands of the enemy, any movement was very problematic." To transfer anti-aircraft batteries from Komarom, special permission from Hitler was required. It arrived only in the evening of the next day. Batteries could be transferred to the Gran only on the condition that "the air defense of the oil refineries near Komarom is preserved." A kind of "squaring the circle" at the end of World War II. But even if these anti-aircraft guns could be transferred, then in Granioni would be only a day later.

Encouraged by the easy success, the command of the 8th Army was already planning to regroup troops to continue the offensive. The following tasks were scheduled for February 20:

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- 1) The SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" should cover Darmot from the south.
- 2) The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth", together with the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", was to regroup and head north to the Barth area.
- 3) In the evening, after dark, the remnants of the Soviet bridgehead should be taken in pincers with two powerful blows from the south and from the north.

However, at that moment, none of the German generals asked the question: where is the legendary Soviet 6th Guards Tank Army? Although it is possible that a similar question occurred to Guderian. It is possible that it was precisely for this reason that he did not share the enthusiasm of the command of Army Group South and demanded that the settlement near the Gran be completed as soon as possible.

Given the potentially quick end of Operation South Wind, it is not surprising that Hitler was no less quick to "modify" his original plan, requiring an advance all the way to the Ipel (Eipel) River. But in order to develop the offensive that had begun so much, at least several bridgeheads east of the Gran were required. This was the only way to tie up the reserves of the 2nd Ukrainian Front. But at the same time, the command of the 8th Army received an order to remove the 2nd Reich Panzer Division from its positions ("taking into account the upcoming transfer of other SS divisions to the south"). On the south bank of the Danube, the place was already being cleared for the operation of the future "big decision". But February 19 was by no means the last day of Operation South Wind.

February 20, 1945 (Tuesday). Fourth day of Operation South Wind

"It was frosty at night, during the day the temperature reached 7 °C above zero. Slight cloudiness. It is clear and sunny. In places there is dense fog. Country roads became passable only this night."

On this day, the German units were mainly engaged in regrouping. In principle, a day of rest was supposed.

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Some of the tankers, after several days of the offensive, wanted to sleep. In the southern part of the Granovsky bridgehead, the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division replaced the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" and the "Signal" battle group, which were departing south.

Some units continued their fighting. At night, the SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" and the 46th Infantry Division tried to take Darmot from two sides. The venture failed. With dawn, a powerful fire fell upon the Germans. The surrounded units of the Red Army did not intend to surrender. Support was provided to them from the opposite bank of the Danube. Until recently, heavy fire from guns and mortars of the Red Army was opened on the Soviet bridgehead. The Germans literally had to squeeze into the ground. The gunners were joined by Soviet attack aircraft, which, under the cover of fighters, opened a uniform hunt for German tank columns. At the same time, powerful fire was opened on the positions of the 711th Infantry Division (southern bank of the Danube). The city of Gran was on fire. At the headquarters of Army Group "South" they could only frightenedly state that huge forces of the Red Army were concentrated south of the city. No one knew the exact data, since almost all German reconnaissance aircraft were destroyed by Soviet fighters.

Considering that Budapest was taken by the Soviet troops, there was nothing surprising in the fact that long columns stretched from its side to the front line. Someone in those days was talking about "3600 cars" that were found on the way to Ipolshag and Balassagyarmat. At the headquarters of Army Group South, they were even afraid to guess what forces would fall on them in the near future. In addition, none of the German generals knew whether the plans of the Soviet command were to inflict

a concentrated attack on the Gran (for example, by the forces of the Pliev army and the 6th Guards Tank Army) or to launch an offensive along the entire front from Lev to the Danube. However, judging by the courage with which the Red Army soldiers surrounded in some settlements fought, the Germans assumed that from day to day on this sector of the front one should expect a Soviet counterattack.

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During the offensive, the German grenadiers used every minute to take a nap

captivity. Yes, indeed, it would be naive to believe that all the forces released after the bloody assault on Budapest will be transferred far to the north to the Slovak mountains.

If we talk about the regrouping of German divisions, then the transfer of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" to the south-west of Barth was possible only at night. A situation that had happened before was repeated. Any moving target became an object of attack by Soviet pilots. Therefore, the division could only be withdrawn in small groups on the night of February 20-21.

The next day, the command of the 8th Army set the following tasks:

"1) Continue the offensive of the SS division "Leibstandarte" and the 46th Infantry Division on Darmot.

2) After dark, the forces of the Hitler Youth Panzer Division, the 211th People's Grenadier Division and units of the 46th Infantry Division eliminate the remnants of the Soviet bridgehead in the Bart-Kemend-Bina triangle.

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3) Parts of the 96th Infantry Division (regimental group "Signal") and the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" should be transferred to the southern bank of the Danube.

The major (for the Germans) part of the "Intermezzo Gran" was over, the SS Panzer divisions were returning to their positions.

February 21, 1945 (Wednesday). Fifth day of Operation South Wind 7

"Light frost at night. During the day the temperature is up to 5 °C above zero. The sky is generally cloudless. Road conditions are improving."

On the night of February 20-21, the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte", supported by shock detachments of the 46th Infantry Division from the south and west, penetrated Darmot. Almost immediately, all German units began to suffer huge losses, as they came under aimed fire from Soviet artillery, which was supplemented by increased bombardment. The battle lasted almost the whole day, only in the evening the Germans captured this settlement. A message about this was sent to the headquarters of the 8th Army at 21:20. The regrouping of the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Jugend" lasted almost until nightfall. As a result, her participation in the battles was scheduled only for February 22.

Soviet troops are being pulled up to the Gran. Most likely, the Soviet command expected the continuation of the German offensive, and therefore wanted to intercept it east of this city. Only this could explain the fact that, having a certain advantage, the Soviet troops did not try to recapture the Granovsky bridgehead from the Germans. |

The near-perfect outcome of Operation South Wind inspired the command of Army Group South to once again return to plans for the "liquidation of all Soviet troops on the southern bank of the Danube." At 6 pm, at the headquarters of Army Group South, the command, together with the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army and the army group Balka, discussed plans for the upcoming operation Spring Awakening.

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February 22, 1945 (Thursday). Day 6 of Operation South Wind

"It's cold at night. During the day the temperature is up to 6 C above zero. The weather changes from clear to overcast. The roads are getting drier."

The remnants of the surrounded units of the Red Army continue to courageously resist. In part, they are helped in this by a sufficient amount of ammunition, including artillery shells. The fire on the Germans is conducted both from the main front line and from the other bank of the Danube. But this does not prevent units of the divisions "Leibstandarte" and "Masters of the Teutonic Order" from completing the cleansing of the territories around Darmot.

The SS division "Hitler Youth" breaks into Barth with battles. Hours of street fighting begin. They subside only in the evening. Barth is almost entirely in the hands of the SS. The only center of Soviet resistance remains Bina, which the command of the 8th Army intends to capture as soon as possible. By this time, both SS Panzer divisions had suffered fairly heavy losses, which amounted to 1,200 men and 30 tanks. The commander of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, not without alarm, reported that "the divisions are as weakened as they were two weeks ago." Nevertheless, the command of the 8th Army planned that these two SS divisions would take Bina. The Leibstandarte was to strike from the south, and the Hitler Youth from the west. The only indulgence was the words: "In order to avoid high losses, especially from heavy artillery fire from the other side, a new offensive must be thoroughly prepared and carried out at night."

In this situation, the chief of staff of the 6th SS Panzer Army stepped in and urged "to check the need for the participation of SS Panzer divisions in such insignificant military actions to the detriment of Operation Spring Awakening". But here the command of the Army Group "South" was able to enlist the opinion of the High Command. The justification for participating in the liquidation of Soviet troops near the Gran was very simple: "The remnants of the Soviet bridgehead can become the germ for a very unfavorable development of events on the northern bank of the Danube, which can

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have a very negative impact on the operation on the southern bank of the Danube.

However, despite the fact that a significant replenishment of the SS Panzer divisions was a very controversial issue, the command of the 8th Army did not refuse to use them in the operation to eliminate the remnants of the Soviet bridgehead. They believed that only the maximum concentration of forces would make it possible to complete the operation in the shortest possible time and with minimal losses. However, the experience of the Hitler Youth division showed that the capture of Barth was associated with huge losses, and the 6th SS Panzer Army still had Operation Spring Awakening ahead! And the very intention of the command of the 8th Army to complete the operation by February 28 was by no means associated with quick and prompt actions.

Danube during spring battles

February 23, 1945 (Friday). Day 7 of Operation South Wind

"Temperature up to 6 °C above zero, overcast. At noon, the sky temporarily cleared up. The condition of the roads is unchanged.

To destroy the remnants of the once powerful Soviet foothold, the German troops were forced to regroup again. Meanwhile, on the front line and in the vicinity of the Gran, the artillery and mortar fire of the Red Army increased every day. Due to poor visibility, there was almost no air activity that day. For this reason, German troops could move in small groups even during the day. At night, 85 German tanks attacked the Soviet

positions on the Bina-Kemend front. The Germans tried to move east, this time expanding their own foothold.

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At the headquarters of the army group, until now, nothing was known about the forces of the Red Army concentrated east of the Gran. Again, no one knew where the Soviet 6th Guards Tank Army was located. But in any case, it was clear to the German command that the Red Army had abandoned the idea of counterattacking the Gran. It was assumed that the command of the 2nd Ukrainian Front was preparing to repel the German offensive on the front between Ipel and Gran, and therefore all Soviet units went on the defensive. But at the headquarters of the 8th Army there were absolutely other information:

"From interrogations of languages and intercepted Russian radio messages, it follows that four enemy infantry and four tank divisions are preparing to attack the Gran. At the same time, the enemy is shelling the lower Gran (part of the city located on the southern coast. - Auth.) with particular ferocity from artillery. In Kemend and Bina, artillery fire is less dense. There is no indication that Gran will be attacked from the encircled remnants of the enemy foothold. On the contrary, it was confirmed that northeast of Leva, in the area of Rybnik, a large artillery formation was heading, which, according to aerial reconnaissance data, had 89 guns. In this case, we could talk about the previous bridgehead created here on the eve of the attack on the Gran.

February 24, 1945 (Saturday). Day 8 of Operation South Wind

"The temperature is up to 6 °C above zero. Strong cloud cover. Windy. Light rainfall in places. Unfortified roads and lowlands are again flooded with water. They are difficult to pass even for caterpillar vehicles. |

It was the day of the actual completion of Operation South Wind. Despite all the calculations of the headquarters of the 8th army, the attack on Kemend turned out to be associated with much greater losses than expected. On the sector of the front between Gran and Kemend, Soviet troops were able to strengthen and prepare for defense. The Leibstandarte division had to advance under fire from 37 Soviet heavy

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tank guns. The elite SS division immediately began to suffer huge losses. By noon, the Leibstandarte, covered by the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", nevertheless managed to break through to the outskirts of Kemend. Fierce battles ensued for each house. Despite the courage of the Soviet soldiers, the Germans still managed to gain a foothold in the city. No less tragic events played out on the western outskirts, which were attacked by the 46th Infantry Division: Before the Germans were able to capture them, they changed hands twice. The retreating Soviet units were suddenly covered by German field artillery fire. Often, Soviet units came under their own artillery fire, which was conducted here as a solid wall. During the retreat, the Red Army blew up all the bridges.

On the same day, the battles for Bina unfolded. The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" attacked this

settlement simultaneously from the north and from the west. By noon, she was able to occupy about half the village. And only after that the 21st People's Grenadier Division joined the offensive. By the end of the day, the Soviet soldiers were forced to leave the village and fight their way to

- re EA M 2 a Crossing one of the many streams in Western Hungary

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front lines. When the pockets of Soviet resistance were eliminated in the northern section of the Granovsky bridgehead, one could say that the South Wind operation was coming to an end, and all the goals set for the German troops had been achieved. At 5:20 p.m., the headquarters of the 8th Army reported "a complete settlement of the situation on the bridgehead near Gran". At 5:45 p.m., the headquarters of Army Group South informed the High Command of the Ground Forces about the successful completion of the offensive operation South Wind.

In the course of it, both fighting sides suffered huge losses. Just a few figures will suffice as an example. The Red Army during the battles near the Gran lost 4 thousand people killed, 700 taken prisoner. Losses in equipment amounted to 90 tanks and 334 guns. But at the same time, out of 102 units of armored vehicles, only 43 vehicles were preserved in good condition in the [SS Panzer Corps. The rather battered SS divisions on the evening of February 24 gathered to leave the Komarom area. Let us also leave this sad place in order to be transported to Szekesfehervar, where there was already [Near the SS Panzer Corps. It was there that other SS Panzer divisions were sent. It was there, between the lakes Velence and Balaton, that the last major tank battle of World War II took place.

Chapter 7 "BATTLE ON PAPER" BEFORE THE BATTLE

In the second half of February 1945, while Operation South Wind was unfolding, active preparations were underway for the destruction of Soviet troops in the Danube-Lake Balaton-Drava triangle. Certain difficulties in coordinating plans for military operations were caused by the position of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast. The two army groups ("F" and "South") did not match at least the time frame for the start of the operation. Field Marshal Weichs stated that he was ready on February 25, 1945 with the forces of four divisions

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force the Drava and launch an attack on Osijek (Esseg). Such terms did not suit the command of Army Group South. It could not launch Operation Spring Awakening so early, if only because Operation South Wind had not yet been completed. There was no question of any preparation of the offensive for this date. The High Command of the Ground Forces agreed with these arguments. But they did not suit the High Command of the Wehrmacht and personally Hitler, who, due to the steadily deteriorating situation on the fronts, wanted to launch a grandiose offensive as soon as possible. Thus, the planning of the operation began with a deliberately unrealistic start date.

On February 21, a meeting was held at the headquarters of Army Group South, in which, in addition to the command of the army group, the chief of staff of the 6th SS Panzer Army Kremer and General Balk took part. As early as February 20, the command of the Balk army group submitted their proposals in writing, which clearly indicated that Balk intended, if not to play a decisive role in the upcoming offensive, then at least to have a significant impact on its preparation.

At the beginning of the meeting, one of the officers of the headquarters of the army group reported on the situation in the area of the forthcoming military operations. It was noted that in addition to the powerful grouping of Soviet troops to the west of captured Budapest, Marshal Tolbukhin significantly strengthened the military grouping located between the Danube and Lake Balaton (Soviet and Bulgarian troops). As a result, it was possible to single out two "epicenters" of the concentration of troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front:

- 1) Kyugu from the line Velence Lake - Sharviz Canal;
- 2) north of Szekesfehervar.

General Balk, who took the floor, outlined his vision of this operation. According to him, the 6th Panzer Army was to attack the area west of the Sharviz Canal with the forces of both SS Panzer Corps. Then her right wing was to advance south of the line Siofok - Enying - Kaloz. The goal of the tank army was to capture the territory northeast of Pecs (Fünfkirchen).

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A day later, the army group Balka (3rd tank corps with three divisions attached to it) would begin to move east from the Sharviz canal, in the direction of the Aba-Sheregeyesh line, after which it would launch an attack in a northeast direction, between the Danube and Lake Velence, advancing the Adon-Kish-Velence line, thereby covering the advancing units from the Soviet troops stationed to the west of Budapest.

In the third phase of the operation, two panzer divisions from the 3rd Panzer Corps were to be wedged between the Danube and the Sharviz Canal. Having reached the town of Szekszard, they would have covered the left flank of the 6th Panzer Army. At the same time, the entire western bank of the Danube would be held by the forces of two infantry divisions, which would prevent the Soviet command from transferring additional forces here. At the same time, this plan did not provide for a special offensive from the Szekesfehervar region, since "the forces of the SS Gutankov Corps located there guaranteed that the enemy would not be able to break through in this direction." When discussing this plan, a number of advantages and disadvantages were identified. At the same time, the main advantage was the fact that the offensive between Balaton and the Sharviz Canal would not take much time to come to the aid of the weaker 2nd Panzer Army (the southern end of Lake Balaton). But at the same time, there were many minuses in the plan:

1) The proposed regrouping of troops would take a long time, and therefore, the 6th Panzer Army could not strike in time between the Danube and Lake Velence.

2) The flank of the 6th Panzer Army along the Sharviz Canal would have remained under threat for some time, since it was not covered from the Soviet troops.

3) The defense carried out on the Velence-Danube section by two infantry divisions was too weak, and Soviet troops west of Budapest could break through it without problems.

Later in the High Command of the Ground Forces, this plan will be called "Decision C1".

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Lieutenant General Grolman recommended changing Balk's plan so that the main direction of attack would be east of the Sharviz Canal. At the same time, the Soviet troops, located west of Budapest, were to be encircled as a result of the breakthrough of five tank divisions. For tank divisions in this regard, there were several advantages:

1) Quick capture With the beginning of the thaw, it was necessary to clean off the white camouflage coloration from the "tigers" (primarily near Dunafeldvar) by crossing the Du River in winter, the immediate liquidation of anti-tank gun crews, and the elimination of the threat of a flank counter-offensive of the Red Army from the east.

2) An enveloping maneuver, the destruction of Soviet troops south of Lake Velence.

3) With the forces of two tank and one infantry divisions, a breakthrough between the Danube and Lake Velence, during which significant tank units rush to the south.

Later, this option was designated "Decision C2".

The command of the 6th SS Panzer Army reacted very favorably to Grolman's variant and flatly refused to agree with Balk's proposals. Major General of the Waffen-SS Kremer did not like the prospect of advancing with unprotected flanks and a very extended supply line. In addition, he did not want to get hit in the rear from Budapest. In general, Balk's plan risked turning into a new cauldron. To do this, it was enough for the Soviet troops to launch a counteroffensive from Szekesfehervar in the direction of Varpalota, Veszprem, and then a little further north, to the Vertes Mountains. In conditions of almost

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· a catastrophic situation with the supply of ammunition supply routes was the most important prerequisite for a successful offensive by SS tank units. In addition, the headquarters of the 6th SS Panzer Army had no doubts about the combat power of [the SS Panzer Corps (albeit not as huge as before). But all the same, it was believed that his forces were clearly not enough to conduct an effective defense, especially if he had to repel a major Soviet offensive.

For this reason, the command of the 6th SS Panzer Army proposed its own plan of action. After some defensive battles, the main purpose of which was to hold the industrial regions of Nagykanizsa, Szekesfehervar and Komarom, it was necessary to prevent the breakthrough of the Red Army in the direction of Vienna. From this point of view, the most likely place for the offensive of the Red Army was Szekesfehervar and the Vertes Mountains. This was indicated at least by the fact that huge forces of the Red Army were concentrated to the west of Budapest. Considerable Soviet forces were also in the Pilis mountains, north of Szekesfehervar, and not far from Mór and Felsjogalla. It was for this reason that not very reliable Hungarian divisions had to be used in this sector. According to Kremer, this was supposed to provoke the Soviet command to attack. Kremer suggested "piercing a red abscess" west of Budapest. When the Soviet troops, having pressed the Hungarians, would go on the offensive, they would be taken by the flares. To do this, it was necessary to form two shock tank groups, which would be placed on both sides of Lake Velence. At the same time, an offensive would also be launched by the infantry group, which was supposed to be located north of Zambek. Moving eastward, it would have made it possible to link up with units of the 2nd Panzer Army. This plan was called "Decision A".

The fourth version of the operation - "Decision B" - was presented by the chief of staff of Army Group South. Apparently, Grolman intended to put it into practice. This decision, actively supported by General Wöhler, provided for "the partial destruction of the enemy forces west of Budapest by attack,

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undertaken by units of the army group Balka from the Bichke region, which should move in the south and southeast directions. At the same time, the 6th Panzer Army was to attack the Soviet positions between the Danube and Lake Velence. The main goal of the offensive was to destroy the Soviet troops in the Velence-Szekesfehervar-Bichke triangle and the subsequent creation of a defensive line along the Erchi-Baracka-Bichke line. Actually, this offensive was supposed to be only a prerequisite for the offensive of five tank divisions to the south. The liquidation of Soviet troops north of Velence was, first of all, to eliminate the possibility of Soviet attacks from the flanks, as well as to interrupt the supply lines of the Red Army units remaining to the west of Budapest. At the same time, the IV SS Panzer Corps, located at that time, according to the plan, between Velence and the Danube, was to act as an operational reserve. The main disadvantages of this plan were:

1) The overall delay in the start of the operation compared to the readiness of the 2nd Panzer Army and the divisions of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast.

2) Partial losses before the start of the offensive in a southerly direction.

But in general terms, this plan satisfied the command of the 6th Panzer Army, which believed that it was necessary to eliminate, first of all, the threat of a counteroffensive from Budapest and the territories adjacent to it from the west. However, at the same time, all those present at the meeting refused Kremer's proposal to advance on both sides of Lake Velence. The refusal was due to the complexity of the landscape in these regions, which the Armei group of Balka had experienced in its time.

With the calculation that Operation South Wind would end on February 24, the start of a new offensive was scheduled for March 5, 1945. At 10 p.m., General Wöhler, in conversation with General

Colonel Guderian said that during the meetings, three options for carrying out the operation were developed (Kremer's proposal, for some reason, was not taken into account as a separate option).
February 22 all cards and explanatory

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Page from the order to start Operation Spring Awakening

the notes ended up on Guderian's desk. On February 25, Wöhler himself arrived at the High Command of the Land Forces to give all the necessary comments. In a conversation with him, Guderian stated that he personally was inclined to implement "Decision B" and would not submit the draft "Decision C2" at all. But at the same time, he made a reservation that at the moment everything depends on the decision of Hitler, who listens to Jodl to a greater extent. In the evening of the same day it became known that Hitler

approved the "Decision C2", and by no means the project proposed by the command of the army group "South". Before it even started, Operation Spring Awakening was in fact already

doomed.

Part 3 FINAL PUSH

Chapter 1 MARCH IN THE MUD

To start Operation Spring Awakening, the 6th Panzer Army was significantly replenished. The imperial grenadier division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" and divisions | cavalry corps. In order to reach their original positions, these compounds had to be transferred to intermediate collection points. To simplify the perception of this information, we present it in the form of a table:

Connection Route Collection point

SS tank corps

1st Panzer Division |Komarom, Raab, Ro-Vesprem, Oshku, Nagy

SS "Leibstandarte" mand, Zhirk, Veszprem | estergar, Bakontomashi, Chot, Bakonbel, Marko

12th Panzer Division | Komarom, Raab, Tet, Marco, Bakonbel, SS "Hitler Youth" Pope, Varoshlod, Mar- |
Choate, Papa, Daka, Waco (Veszprem) roschlod

Corps groups following the divisions in the bulk behind the 12th SS Panzer Division

Panzer groups on the Veszprem railway

P SS Panzer Corps

2nd Panzer Division | Raab, Zirts, Varpalota | Varpalota, Bakonku-SS "Reich" tee, Shur, Bakonbank, Romand

Connection Route Collection point

9th Panzer Division | Raab, Kishber, Mor Bakonykuti, Bodike, SS Hohenstaufen (Szekesfehervar) Mor, Kishber, Bakonybank

Corps groups following the divisions in the bulk behind the 2nd SS Panzer Division

Panzer groups on the Varpalota railway, (Veszprém)

44th Imperial Grenade | Komárom, Kishber, Yoshi, Sharkezy, Morder Division "Ma- | Mor, (Szekesfehervar)

hysters of the Teutonic

orders"

1st Cavalry Corps

3rd cavalry division | Tata, Bokod, Mor, Za- | Madyaralmash, Chokako, VISION is mine, (Szekesfehervar) | Bodike

4th Cavalry Division | Tata, Bokod, Mor, Szekesfehervar, Shar-VIZIA Sharkerestesh kerestesh, Madyaralmash, Iskaszentgyörgy

Corps groups following the 3rd division

Motorized by rail Veszprem Group

In this plan for the transfer of the 6th Panzer Army, several weak points could immediately be seen. Firstly, the Kishber-Mor-Szekesfehervar highway had to experience an incredibly heavy load. A very large number of tanks and vehicles had to pass through it. This concerned the "land" part of the transfer of at least four divisions - "Hohenstaufen", "Masters of the Teutonic Order", the 3rd and 4th cavalry divisions. Movement was further hampered by the fact that until recently all these divisions had been subordinate to the headquarters of different armies. Among other things, along this route there was a transfer of troops of the Balka army group. All this overlapped each other and led to traffic jams. The hardest hit was heavy artillery, which could not get around by detours and for the transportation of which either tractors or heavy loads were required.

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zoviki. The designated time of advance could be observed only under conditions of the most accurate calculations of traffic flows, but for some reason, as before, for some reason no one bothered to do this. In general, the "logistics" in the German army was put very badly. The movement was again complicated by the traditional problem - hiding from Soviet attack aircraft and bombers, the columns moved mainly at night.

The second problem was the reassignment of some of the connections. So, for example, at the headquarters of the Balka army group, they had just begun to plan the transfer of the cavalry corps, when it was transferred to the command of the 6th Panzer Army. The tankers themselves did not assume that they would also have to deal with the problems of the cavalry units.

Alarming reports from the headquarters of the tank corps about traffic jams prompted the commander of the 6th Panzer Army, Sepp Dietrich, to send a staff officer to conduct a detailed reconnaissance on the ground. Early in the morning of March 1, this officer left on a half-tracked armored personnel carrier for the command post of the IV SS Panzer Corps. When he arrived at the scene, he realized that the almost panic reports were by no means an exaggeration - the situation was almost catastrophic. Trucks bogged down in the mud and swamp were seen everywhere. Many of them were already broken. It was not possible to repair them on the ground, even in such mud. Individual soldiers tried to fight the slush by placing bundles of twigs and logs under the tires, but it was all in vain. The situation could have been corrected by the tractors, which were able to pull the vehicles out of the mud, but they were already far away, as they were delivering artillery. Unable to move, the stranded transport columns were first noticed by Soviet air reconnaissance, and then became the property of Soviet bombers and attack aircraft. There was no need to talk about the surprise effect at all, since it was clear that the Germans were preparing a major operation somewhere between the lakes Velence and Balaton. By the way, the territory between these lakes during the spring thaws was a real nightmare - from lake to lake many kilometers stretched

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At the beginning of Operation Spring Awakening, German vehicles got stuck in the mud

muddy swamps that dried up closer to summer. The closer to the starting positions the units of the 6th SS Panzer Army approached, the more often they discovered that these territories were under water, and therefore could not be used as a strategic springboard for the offensive. By the way, on the more elevated, "Soviet" side of the front line, everything was not so scary. The Soviet command was not even concerned about the overflowing Danube.

Upon returning to the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army, the seconded officer reported that he found the information received to be completely justified. Moreover, he noted that reaching the initial positions on time is hardly possible, and therefore it is not necessary to talk about the start of the offensive on March 5. At best, it can only begin on the afternoon of March 6. Without infantry reinforcements, a tank offensive on a completely open area was immediately ruled out. Artillery could be hidden in individual villages and estates, if it could be delivered to the front line in a timely manner at all. The same applied to cavalry and anti-aircraft artillery. It was at this time that Sepp Dietrich recalled the words of Waffen-SS General Gille, who, already knowing well

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these regions, warned in advance about the "treachery" of the landscape in Western Hungary. The only road that was more or less passable was the Veszprem-Varpalota-Szekesfehervar highway. But it was almost perpendicular to the course that the German units were supposed to follow. The only thing that went smoothly in that situation was the delivery of equipment by rail. But in the current situation, this almost did not play any role - the start of the offensive had to be postponed.

Cursing the weather, the German command expected it to change. Almost no one believed in a sharp warming and the cessation of rains, and therefore everyone expected severe frosts, which were able to almost instantly forge the clay porridge that stretched for many kilometers. But in both cases it took time. In fact, "strategic" adjustments "for the weather" were a novelty only for the command of the 6th Panzer Army. In the Balka army group they had long been accustomed to this and now almost made no mistakes in their calculations over time. Unforeseen thaws in these parts played a cruel joke on the Germans not for the first time. The first time was in December 1944, when, during Operation Late Grape Harvest, the then commander of Army Group South, Colonel General Frisner, refused to send tanks into the swamp. The second case was the South Wind operation described above. But then the thaw had not yet fully come into its own, and therefore the situation for the Germans under the Gran

turned out to be not so hopeless. And the third case was the Operation "Forest Devil" thwarted by the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast, when the Drava that overflowed its banks did not allow launching an offensive in the intended direction. In this situation, the inactivity of the majority of commanding instances was indicative, especially the headquarters of the Balk group, who liked to boast that "even Hitler listened to him."

Despite the danger of arousing Hitler's wrath, Sepp Dietrich still decided to report the situation to the Fuhrer's Headquarters and notify the High Command of the Ground Forces about this. Moreover, he personally called Colonel General Guderian in Zossen to tell him about his predicament. Apparently "above"

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this information was not considered an exaggerated exaggeration. This is evidenced at least by the fact that the very next day an officer of the General Staff was sent with a plane to Sepp Dietrich. He flew to the location of the 6th Panzer Army in the afternoon of March 2. Seeing the seriousness of the situation, he urgently contacted the operations department of the High Command, demanding that additional transport be provided urgently. The command of the 6th Panzer Army began to hope that, perhaps, the start of the offensive would be postponed for a day or two.

But at the same time, the command of Army Group South did not even think of taking any emergency measures. The daily report only stated: "The condition of the roads has deteriorated to the limit due to the prolonged thaw. This applies in particular to the positions of the army group Balka. Even in frosty conditions, the roads were difficult for cars and trucks." Not a single word about the actual disruption of the timing of the start of the military operation! In this situation, only Sepp Dietrich was active. Neither Grolman nor Wöhler attempted to take any action that was in the least reminiscent of Frisner's past actions.

Until the moment when a new decision was made by Hitler, everyone was guided by the fact that the offensive should begin on March 6th. In the meantime, the German units received rather standard orders: "Forward, by all means! Calendar deadlines should not be disrupted. They must be observed at all costs." And stuck up to their ears in the mud, the German units tried to move forward. There is no trace of the recent enthusiasm for the success of Operation South Wind. The field commanders just shook their heads. The lower staff began to almost openly express their dissatisfaction. But the junior commanders had only one excuse: "So the Fuhrer ordered." The war diary of Army Group South in those days recorded: "Movement on the roads suffers greatly from the hourly changing weather. That heavy rains are replaced by hot, almost spring weather. Then the heat sets in, and the just-frozen earth again turns into mud and slurry. For restoring roads, pulling trucks and other equipment

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ki were involved not only the Hungarian soldiers, but also all the local residents. Engineering and construction battalions turned out to be recalled even from the front line. The greatest difficulties awaited the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", which in a few days was not able to significantly advance south of Komarom. And in the messages of the headquarters of the Army Group "South" there was only a dry phrase: "There are doubts that this division will be able to reach the starting positions by the deadline."

All the forces of the field gendarmerie were involved in organizing the movement, but they were not enough. In addition, after the battles in the Ardennes and active bombing, the 6th Panzer Army had only a gendarmerie company at its disposal. The promised completion was still on the way.

Added to all these difficulties was the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast, who began to openly doubt the necessity of carrying out the planned operation. To discuss this issue, he sent Lieutenant Colonel Doinsin to the headquarters of Army Group South, who, without hesitation,

stated that "the offensive of the KhS] (91st) army corps, due to the lack of heavy artillery and the complexity of the territory, may not achieve the desired goal."

Under these conditions, the amazing calmness of the Soviet command looks very unusual. At the front, units of the new allies of the USSR, the Romanians and Bulgarians, began to appear more and more often. In the area of the Gran, which was actually flooded by the overflowing Danube, fresh Soviet cavalry squadrons were seen, which indicated that Pliev's army was approaching the front line.

The position of the Hungarians also brought trouble to the Germans. It was during these days that the so-called "Red Hungarian Liberation Army" began to form. Every day, several people from the Hungarian divisions hid in an unknown direction or crossed over to the Soviet side. The command of Army Group South ordered no more Hungarian battalions to be sent to reconnaissance. Often, scout detachments simply did not return. The command of the Hungarian divisions claimed that they must have been captured by the "Russians". But the Germans did not believe this. To prevent

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mass exodus, Hungarian units were introduced into the German divisions. At the same time, their positions were guarded by some semblance of German "protective detachments". Anyone who tried to escape was shot on the spot. In addition, German officers began to bear personal responsibility for the number of Hungarian units. It is for this reason that in the German units the Hungarians began to be treated not as allies, but as a burden and an extra headache. The thaws turned the Hungarian landscapes into impassable mud on the roads, in the army group Balka it was decided to introduce the so-called "traffic courts". It was a punitive body that, without trial or investigation, shot on the spot those "guilty" of causing traffic jams and congestion. The 6th Panzer Army abandoned this practice, since it would not give any positive effect, but would only embitter the soldiers even more. Actually, Balk himself did not count on a positive effect from such "courts". He just wanted to make a good impression "upstairs". In fact, such measures were an expression of his own helplessness.

It is not clear how, but by March 5, units of the 6th Panzer Army were still able to reach their original positions. At 2 am (from March 4 to 5), Sepp Dietrich set up his headquarters in Keszthely (northwest coast of Lake Balaton). He had several buildings at his disposal:

- /[The Hungarian army corps, consisting of the 20th infantry and 9th reserve divisions, occupied positions from Keszthely to Balatonalmádi (northern coast of Balaton). The command post is in Balatonfüred (about 15 kilometers south of Veszprem).

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/ The cavalry corps, consisting of the 3rd and 4th cavalry divisions and the 25th Hungarian infantry division subordinate to them, occupied positions from Balatonalmádi to Echi (southeast coast of Balaton). The command post is at Papkessi (about 14 kilometers east of Veszprem).

e / SS Panzer Corps, consisting of the divisions "Leibstandarte" and "Hitler Youth" and subordinate units of the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division, occupied the area from Echi to the Sharviz Canal. Command post - in - Sylvester Stadler, commander of Laslómire (2 kilometers on the SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" north of Polgrad).

- [1 SS Panzer Corps, consisting of the divisions "Reich", "Hohenstaufen", "Masters of the Teutonic Order" and the 23rd Panzer Division, occupied positions from the Sharviz Canal to Sheregeyesh. The command post is in Inote (8 kilometers west of Szekesfehervar).

Further north, on the left flank, were the positions of the army group Balka. At the same time, the immediate neighbors of the 6th Panzer Army were the SS Panzer Corps of the SS and the Shtankovy Corps, which, in addition to the 1st and 3rd Panzer Divisions, included the 356th Infantry Division.

Before heading to his command post, Sepp Dietrich once again found himself at the headquarters of Army Group South, where he asked General Wöhler to reschedule the offensive. But there is not a single line about this request in the army group's war diary. It is only succinctly written there: "SS-Oberstgruppenführer Dietrich, commander of the 6th Panzer Army, visited the commander of Army Group South to discuss the details of the Awakening offensive.

spring."

As expected, Wöhler refused Dietrich's request. He referred to the Führer's order, to the general situation on the front

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tach, for Soviet air reconnaissance, etc. In this situation, Dietrich was forced to be content with the fact that most of his

troops arrived at their original positions on time. For the whole day, he could not change the situation and, having gathered the officers in the evening, he told them: "Tomorrow we will attack! If our tanks get stuck in the mud, we will have to advance on foot." On the night of March 5-6, 1945, no one slept in the German headquarters, there was a storm of activity. The exit of the 6th Panzer Army to the positions specified in the orders ended only two hours before the start of the offensive - at 2 am on March 6, 1945.

CHAPTER 2 THE RELATION OF FORCES

Generally speaking, the military operations in Western Hungary around Lake Balaton included several operations. At that time, Army Group South consisted of 36 divisions and 1 motorized brigade, that is, 36.5 divisions. Of these, 11 divisions took part in Operation Spring Awakening, and another 4 in Operation Icebreaker. That is, 40% of the army group "South" were to take part in the fighting off the coast of Lake Balaton. To these 15 divisions, 4 more divisions should be added, allocated by the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast for Operation Forest Devil. At the same time, a front was formed with a length of 380-400 kilometers, which should be held by the forces of the remaining 21.5 divisions (60% of the Army Group South), which for the most part were to be in reserve or be used to replenish the fighting units.

If we talk about the combat readiness of divisions, then it was different - each division had its own. As of March 3, 1945, it can be said that there were strong differences between the individual divisions both in personnel and in material support. Such indicators can be, for example, the number and strength of the available combat battalions, the number of heavy weapons, artillery batteries, as well as the degree of mobility of certain units and formations. From this point of view,

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It seems not entirely true that the Waffen-SS formations were better armed or equipped than the formations of other types of troops. People who make such claims may not know that throughout the Second World War, all fighting German units had to report monthly to the organizational department of the High Command about the state of the units. At the same time, this document was not an empty formality or formality. The commander who filled it out had to take into account many different factors:

- regular and real number;

e. the prescribed and available number of weapons,

- supply vehicles;

- the number of armored and non-armored vehicles, with a separate indication of how many percent are in operation and how many are under repair;

- the presence of mobile units (the proportion of motorized infantry was indicated), etc. |

On this report, the so-called "commander's assessment" was made, after which a corresponding conclusion was made in the higher headquarters, which took into account such factors as: the level of preparedness of the soldiers; moods that reigned in part; emerging difficulties. Only after this was a conclusion made about the combat effectiveness of the unit and the possibility of its use in battles.

Actually, this assessment was made traditionally on a four-point system:

1 - suitable for participation in the offensive;

P - limitedly suitable for offensive missions;

ÿ - fully suitable for defense;

[U - suitable for defense only in special conditions.

Over time, the practice of compiling short weekly bulletins, which took into account the following indicators, began to be applied to this classification and to monthly reports:

- name of the unit (indicating the name and rank of the commander);

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e number of combat battalions (infantry and sappers), which were distributed according to their combat strength. The latter was indicated on a simple scale of gradations (based on the size of the battalion):

– strong = more than 400 people

– overall strong = 300 to 400 people

– moderate = 200 to 300 people

– weak = 100 to 200 people

- weakened = less than 100 people

In addition, the "weeklies" indicated the presence of artillery batteries, the number of anti-tank weapons and armored vehicles, the level of mobility (for motorized infantry); combat capability, measured according to the above four-point system.

So, if we turn to these documents compiled at the beginning of Operation Spring Awakening, we will see the following picture:

Status Weekly Connection on March 3rd | bulletin dated 10 March 1945, 1945

2nd Panzer Army

16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer"

71st Infantry Division 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division 118th Jaeger Division

6th Panzer Army

G Cavalry Corps

P SS Panzer Corps 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich"

9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen"

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Status Weekly | Connection on March 3 | bulletin dated 10 March 1945, 1945

44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order"

23rd Panzer Division

Army Group Balka (6th Army)* IIA

Sh tank corps

1st Panzer Division 3rd Panzer Division

356th Infantry Division

* Ignoring IV SS Panzer Corps (SS divisions "Totenkopf" and "Viking").

The table shows that by the beginning of Operation Spring Awakening, only the Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" had the rating [. That is, for the entire Army Group "South" there was only one and only division, which could fully participate in the offensive operation without any formal restrictions. Almost all tank divisions could take part in the offensive to a limited extent, and another four divisions were suitable only for defensive operations. At the same time, a few days after the start of the offensive operation, the 3rd Cavalry and 71st Infantry Divisions suffered such losses that they deserved an even lower combat capability rating than a week ago. If we talk about the 3rd SS Panzer Division "Totenkopf", which was also originally planned to be involved in the offensive operation, then its condition was so bad that it was decided to leave it in reserve. At the beginning of March, the division could hardly count a fully equipped tank regiment. It is noteworthy that the German divisions were sent on the offensive regardless of whether they were "destined" for attack or only for defense. In this situation, such assessments lost all meaning. During the fighting at the end of the war, the Germans were no longer up to assessing the combat capability of the formations.

If we talk about the combat composition of divisions, then we need to go back a little. During the fierce battles of 1943, which

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which became a turning point in World War II, the Germans suffered huge losses that they could not compensate for with the same "qualified" military personnel, who had not only months of training, but also vast combat experience behind them. In this situation, the most severe (for the German army) were the losses of officers and non-commissioned officers. As a result, by 1944, the military formations became somewhat smaller than they were in Hugo Kraas, tank commander in 1941-1942. The combat strength of the SS division "Hitler Youth" of the company was officially reduced

somewhere around 100 people. This was supposed to make it easier for young German officers who did not have sufficient combat experience to command. However, the "trinity" of the military division was preserved.

It was precisely because of this that the number of divisions was reduced (to make it more convenient to command them). As a result, by the end of 1944, we could see the following picture.

An infantry division consisted of two regiments of three battalions each = six battalions. To. they had to add a sapper battalion = seven battalions. The division also had to have an artillery regiment, consisting of two or three battalions, each with six or eight batteries of four guns. As a result, this gave the division firepower of about fifty guns (most of which were light field 105 mm guns and a few heavy 150 mm guns). If we add to this anti-tank defense, reconnaissance groups, communications units, supply units, etc., then it turns out that in 1944 a full-time infantry division should have consisted of 12-13 thousand people.

Jaeger divisions were a more mobile, "lighter" version of infantry divisions. Maneuverability and operational

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The strength was achieved due to the smaller number and the prevailing light weapons. A jaeger division usually consisted of two regiments of three battalions each, one artillery regiment and a sapper battalion. That is, it should have included 10-11 thousand Human.

Volksgrenadier divisions, which only began to be created in the autumn of 1944, resembled traditional infantry divisions in many ways, except for the fact that they had fewer supply units. As a result of this, the combat composition of the division had to be approximately equal to the personnel. But at the same time, the strength of the people's grenadier division was equal to that of the chasseurs - 11,000 people. It should be noted that almost all employees of such divisions were recruits and therefore had less experience, and therefore, such divisions themselves were less combat-ready. The same applies to the volunteer formations of the Waffen-SS. But in this connection one should not confuse the people's grenadier divisions with the imperial grenadier divisions. The latter, in particular, the division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", were the elite formations of the Wehrmacht.

Mountain rifle and people's mountain rifle divisions were used mainly (as the name implies) in mountainous areas. But at the same time, it was not excluded that they were often "used for other purposes". However, these divisions have always been considered elite. The total number of mountain rifle divisions usually amounted to 12,000 men. |

Panzergrénadier (motorized infantry, mechanized or motorized rifle) divisions consisted of two regiments of three battalions each = 6 battalions. The traditional sapper battalion = 7 battalions was added to them. At the same time, at least one battalion in each regiment was equipped with armored personnel carriers, which were supposed to keep up with the tanks during the offensive. This structure was joined by a tank battalion or a battalion of assault guns. In the case of tanks, each battalion consisted of two to three companies of light tanks and one company of heavy tanks. But often tank battalions were absent (for various reasons) in the structure of the Panzergrénadier division, and therefore its command came

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I had to be content with a few batteries of assault guns. As a result, the staffing of this kind of divisions assumed 13 - 14 thousand people.

By 1945, tank divisions had, as a rule, one tank regiment of two three battalions of 48 tanks each. Sometimes an assault gun battalion of 36 guns each was added to them. However, this did not exclude the possibility that by the end of the war there were divisions in general consisting of two battalions. But large tank formations had to have a company of "tigers" (less often "King Tigers") in their composition. It should not be assumed that the tank divisions consisted only of tanks. They also included two panzergrénadier regiments.

two or three battalions each. Taking into account the artillery subunits, a tank division should have consisted of 14,000–18,000 men. In this situation, the German "tank brigades" could actually turn out to be only slightly reinforced tank battalions.

If we return to the military operations in the Balaton region, then the figures in the Soviet and German sources will be very significantly depleted. Soviet documents indicated that 9 tank divisions, 3 infantry and 2 cavalry divisions took part in the operation. At the same time, this grouping numbered 147 thousand people, and its armament (according to Soviet documents) consisted of 807 tanks and assault guns, more than 3200 infantry guns and heavy mortars. German documents show a somewhat different picture. The group preparing for the offensive had a little more than 300 tanks and assault guns. At the same time, simply fantastic figures are given in the post-war Soviet literature. I will cite them, refraining from any comments. "For the operation against the 3rd Ukrainian Front, a grouping of 310 thousand people was formed, which had about 6 thousand guns and mortars, 1600 tanks and assault guns, 800 thousand armored personnel carriers and armored cars, 859 aircraft." If these figures were true, then the battles off the coast of Lake Balaton could quite easily "eclipse" the battle near Prokhorovka.

But let's try to determine the real size of the German group.

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6th Panzer Army

Command together with army units 1416 Command [corps together with corps units 3883 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" 18671 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" 17423 40177 Command of the II Corps together with corps 3036 units 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" 19542 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" 17229 39807 TOTAL 81400 Command of the G Cavalry Corps together 2600 | with corps units 3rd Cavalry Division 7000 4th Cavalry Division 8000 17600 44th Imperial Grenadier DIVISION 14000 "Masters of the Teutonic Order" 23rd Panzer Division (Army Group Reserve) 12000 26000 6th Army (Army Group Bal ka) Tank Corps IT Command with 3,000 corps units 1st Panzer Division 16,000 3rd Panzer Division 15,000 356th Infantry Division 11,000 45,000 TOTAL FOR THE NORTHERN ATTACK GROUP 170,000 Attack Group of the 2nd Panzer Army 50,000 TOTAL GERMAN GROUPING, 220000

COMING UNDER BALATON

At the same time, it should be taken into account that in this table we are not talking about the "combat strength", but about the number, which included the wounded, sick and missing in the last 4 weeks.

If we talk about the combat power and weapons of this grouping, then on the basis of the documents the following picture emerges: the 6th Panzer Army (excluding the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division, but taking into account the 23rd Panzer Division), except among other things, had:

- 57 engineer and infantry battalions;
- 320 tanks and assault guns (another 220 armored vehicles were under repair);

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- 136 heavy anti-tank guns;
- 272 field guns (68 batteries);
- 48 mortars (7 batteries);

- 72 guns from the 403rd People's Artillery Corps.

Even if we add anti-aircraft guns, corps artillery and reserve artillery to these figures, we still do not get the figures indicated in the domestic literature.

With the width of the "offensive front" of the 6th SS Panzer Army of 40 kilometers, it is possible to calculate the average "tactical density". In this case, it is 700 meters of front for 1 battalion. At the same time, 8 serviceable tanks, 3.5 anti-tank guns, 10 field guns were to fall on one kilometer of the front. However, all these figures are just statistical pranks, which are unlikely to convey the real situation, since, depending on the tactical tasks, the tactical density in individual sectors could be more or less.

Repulsing the German offensive "Spring Awakening" became the most important task for Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin, commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. At that time, the positions of the 3rd Ukrainian Front stretched from the Vertesh mountains to the Drava.

According to the instructions of the Headquarters, it was necessary to create a line of defense. The main tasks were:

- 1) repelling a massive German tank offensive;
- 2) in the event of a breakthrough of the Soviet line of defense - preventing the rapid advance of German units forward;
- 3) ensuring freedom of action for units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front for the duration of the entire defensive operation.

To accomplish these tasks, several defensive lines were prepared. Due to the fact that some bridgeheads did not differ in tactical depth, individual defensive fortifications were at a considerable distance from each other. Nevertheless, the defense could rely on a well-prepared system of trench fortifications. The command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front paid special attention to issues of anti-tank defense. To uni--

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All types of troops were connected to the destruction of German tanks. At the same time, special barriers and minefields could prevent a sudden breakthrough of German tanks. The largest amount of anti-tank artillery was concentrated on the sector of the front bounded by Lake Velence and the Sharviz Canal. It was this area that favored the active use of German tanks, assault guns and armored personnel carriers.

The 3rd Ukrainian Front itself was divided into two hours

tee and a separate reserve group:

1st echelon of the 3rd Ukrainian Front (defense) |

4th Guards Army 8 divisions | Gant - Velence Lake - Sharviz Canal (50 kilometers)

26th Army, 10 divisions | Sharviz Canal - southeastern shore of Lake Balaton - north of Martsali (50 kilometers)

57th Army, 6 divisions | South shore of Lake Balaton - Nagybayom - Drava (80 kilometers)

1st Bulgarian Army 6 divisions | Drava neighborhood near Barcha (80 kilometers)

2nd echelon of the 3rd Ukrainian Front (behind the positions of the 4th and 26th armies)

30 divisions

27th Army 37th Rifle Corps | 4 divisions | On the west bank of the Danube

15th Guards Strel- | 5 divisions | On the east bank of the Danube kovy corps

33rd Rifle Corps | 4 divisions,

Total -43 DIVISIONS

Operational Reserve Group of the 3rd Ukrainian Front

18th Panzer Corps Southwest of Adoni

23rd Panzer Corps North of Pazmand

Northwest of Dunafeldvar

5th Guards Cavalry - West of Pakash

Russian corps stirrup

Valerian divisions

1st Guards Mechanized Corps

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In addition, Marshal Tolbukhin had at his disposal the 17th Air Army and the special Danube Flotilla. And also, as a reserve of the Headquarters in this sector of the front, there was the 9th Guards Army. She was supposed to take part in the Vienna offensive operation planned for March 15, 1945. She stood southeast of Budapest.

If we evaluate the forces of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, which could be attracted to repel the German offensive, then the picture looks like this:

- 407 thousand people;
- 6890 guns and mortars;
- 407 tanks and self-propelled guns;
- 965 aircraft.

Soviet superiority was felt not only in the number of troops. The Red Army at that time had a very high morale. In addition, the Soviet units actually did not know any difficulties with the supply. Fuel, ammunition, provisions, the necessary replenishment - all this came at the right time.

In order to more realistically correlate the German and Soviet forces, it is necessary to make a few remarks regarding the formation of the Soviet units:

A Soviet rifle division, as a rule, consisted of three rifle regiments, a sapper battalion, an artillery regiment, and separate supply, communications, and anti-tank defense groups. In general, it corresponded to a German infantry division, although the Soviet formation was somewhat smaller - it consisted of 9-10 thousand people. There were no tank and panzergrenadier divisions in the Soviet army. They roughly corresponded to tank and mechanized corps. Tank and grenadier regiments corresponded to tank and mechanized brigades.

The traditional Soviet tank corps of the Second World War consisted of three tank brigades of 60 tanks each = 180 tanks, one mechanized brigade and rifle regiment, one self-propelled artillery regiment and one anti-tank artillery regiment. That is, the total strength of the Soviet tank corps was 11 thousand people. The same number of people counted

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vetsky mechanized corps, with the exception that it changed the number of tanks and mechanized brigades. The Bulgarian and Romanian units largely corresponded to the German military classification. At the same time, for the most part, they were armed with German weapons.

The Soviet defense itself was divided into three successively echeloned defensive lines. Behind the front line, whose depth was 5 kilometers, at a distance of 3-8 kilometers (depending on the conditions of the landscape and the characteristics of the territory), there was a second line, whose depth was 3-4 kilometers. And, finally, at a distance of 20 kilometers from it was the so-called rear line of defense. It is worth noting that even the Germans admitted that the Red Army soldiers were masters of building defensive fortifications. "Often they were better with a shovel than with a rifle."

By the time of the German spring offensive in Hungary, units of the 3rd Ukrainian Front were able to build 1,500 kilometers of defensive structures. 2,400 kilometers of trenches and trenches were dug, and 250,000 anti-tank and infantry mines were laid. Do not forget that all this was done in winter conditions.

Such preparation for the defense clearly shows that the Soviet command considered the 6th SS Panzer Army, which arrived on the Eastern Front, to be a very dangerous and serious enemy.

If we evaluate the overall ratio of German and Soviet forces, then it looks approximately as follows:

- infantry 3:4;
- e artillery 1:1;
- armored vehicles 4:1;
- e aviation 1:1.

As you can see, the Germans significantly outnumbered the Red Army only in the number of tanks, assault guns and armored personnel carriers. In terms of other indicators, they clearly did not have the numerical advantage that they should have had before the start of a large-scale offensive operation.

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Probably, for Operation Spring Awakening, the Germans wanted to take advantage of the following weak points of the 3rd Ukrainian Front:

- 1) The left wing of the front (the 1st Bulgarian army) is somewhat "HANGED".
- 2) The bridgehead on the western bank of the Danube had a tactical depth of 25 to 40 kilometers. At the same time, the Soviet bridgehead at Lake Balaton had a depth of up to 120 kilometers. All this could complicate the regrouping of Soviet troops.
- 3) The Danube was a wide water barrier located in the rear of the bridgeheads, which made it difficult to supply Soviet troops on the western bank.

4) Lake Balaton, with its expanses, could prevent the timely start of the Soviet offensive.

But with all this, Marshal Tolbukhin had several advantages that he could (as practice has shown) competently use:

- Despite all the secrecy and precautions, the Soviet command already at the end of February 1945 knew about the upcoming German offensive. German tanks were waiting on defensive lines well prepared for this. That is, the Germans lost their notorious advantage — the “surprise factor”.

- The SS Panzer Corps was unable to reach their original positions in time. As a result, he was forced to start the offensive, so to speak, “at half strength”. As a result of this, the possibility of a Soviet strike on the flank of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, located slightly to the north, appeared.

- Unexpected waterlogging of the area prevented the Germans from using tanks and

Otto Kumm, commander of the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler" assault guns wide Hitler" front. The offensive could

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carried out in only a few areas. For this reason, the German infantry and motorized infantry were in the forefront of the attackers. Therefore, a quick breakthrough of powerful Soviet defensive lines was impossible. The Germans did not have a single prerequisite for the successful implementation of Operation Spring Awakening.

Chapter 3 OPERATION SPRING WAKE

March 6, 1945 (Tuesday). First day of Operation Spring Awakening

At about 2 a.m., the commanders of the 1st Cavalry Corps and the [SS Panzer Corps, as well as the commander of the artillery units of the 6th Panzer Army, reported that they had reached their original positions and were ready to launch the offensive. By that time, the II SS Panzer Corps was still on the march. Only some tank and artillery units were at their starting positions. It was assumed that at 4 o'clock in the morning it was possible to launch an offensive with limited forces. These circumstances pretty much confused the command of the 6th Panzer Army, which planned to launch an offensive with all its might. But it still did not begin to wait for the approach of all parts of the II SS Panzer Corps.

“The temperature is about 0 °C. Strong cloud cover. Snowfall. Poor visibility in the area. The condition of the roads due to the fallen snow and the re-emergence of a thaw begins to worsen again... The enemy is actively using his combat aircraft south of Lake Velence, as well as in the area of Sentkerest, Altsol and Neusol. Our air force is supporting the offensive between Lake Balaton and the Sharviz Canal. Despite the bad weather, about 45 sorties of attack aircraft and fighters were made in the afternoon.

The German offensive operation “Spring Awakening” began under the following conditions. At about one in the morning, the XI (91st) Army Corps (Commander in Chief in the South-East) crossed the Drava in five different places (Operation "Forest Devil"). Under conditions of little

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resistance of the Bulgarian and Soviet units, the Germans managed to create a bridgehead on the northern coast, which was located just north of Valpovo and Donji Miholyats. It was from these positions that the German units were to strike further to the northeast.

At about 4 o'clock in the morning, the 2nd Panzer Army, after a short artillery preparation, began an offensive on both sides of Nagybayom. On the one hand, the Soviet positions were attacked by the GKhUSh (68th) Army Corps (three divisions), on the other hand, by the XXII Mountain Rifle Corps (one division). The advanced units of the 2nd Panzer Army did not manage to make any significant progress. Even in the morning, most of the advancing units continued to be under heavy fire from Soviet artillery. The most fierce resistance was offered by the Soviet units in the area of Nagybayom and Kaposvár. In some places, the units of the Red Army launched counterattacks, during which they drove the Germans back to their original positions. As a result, the German units were forced to wait for the onset of darkness in order to carry out the necessary regrouping under its cover. Only under these conditions was it possible to continue the offensive south of Lake Balaton (Operation Icebreaker).

The 6th Panzer Army also promptly launched an offensive on the right flank (1st Cavalry Corps) and in the center (1st SS Panzer Corps). They attacked the Soviet positions between Lake Velence and the Sharviz Canal, moving south. But here, too, the Germans did not expect a major success. As reported in the combat log, "because of the powerful resistance

The tank crew at their starting positions in front of the enemy, who was waiting for the start of the operation "Spring Coming" of the offensive, and

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boggy landscape, which did not allow the active use of tanks and heavy artillery, it was possible to occupy only small areas of the territory.

Parts of the cavalry corps could not advance at all. The unexpected attack of the 4th cavalry division was answered by the units of the Red Army with an instant counterattack. After a fierce battle, the parties dispersed to their positions. The "status quo" was maintained. Something similar happened in the positions of the 3rd Panzer Division. Only 1 SS Panzer Corps managed to really move forward. But even here one could hardly count on a major tactical success, since the utankists felt a lack of ammunition, and the terrain, which had turned into solid swamps, did not allow frontal attacks.

Only the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" with great difficulty managed to "hook" on small areas of territory on both sides of Kischlang. As a result, by the end of the day, the 1st SS Panzer Corps managed to break through the Soviet minefields and advance in the direction of the Sharviz Canal, towards Shoponya. In the sector between Kishlang and Shoponya, one of the tank units advanced 2 kilometers to the southeast. But during this attack the Germans lost too many tanks. Only now the command of the 6th Panzer Army began to remember the warnings of the Hungarian officers, who dissuaded them from conducting combat operations in the "period of mud" — during the Hungarian thaw.

At that time, the 11th SS Panzer Corps participated in the offensive only through. their artillery, which fired on Soviet positions. Despite the messages sent earlier, he was in fact not Vulhelm Bittrich, the commander was ready to attack. All attempts by the SS Panzer Corps

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attempts to break through the Soviet line of defense with limited forces ended in complete failure. In the mud, the tanks were virtually useless. In fact, the offensive of the units (albeit not fully equipped) of the II Panzer Corps began at 18:30, that is, almost noon late. They tried to move eastward towards the Sharviz Canal between the positions of [SS Panzer Corps and III Panzer Corps. From the meager reports received by the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army, it became clear that at that moment only advanced reconnaissance detachments of the tank corps took part in the battles.

The 3rd Panzer Corps (Army Group Balka) also launched an offensive at 4 o'clock in the morning. His forces attacked the Soviet positions on both sides of Sheregeyesh, where a small offensive bridgehead had been established. But the German tankers failed to take Sheregeyesh from the raid. Only a few units were able to approach its northern outskirts. The 1st Panzer and 356th Infantry Divisions operated in this sector. The 3rd Panzer Division was not able to reach its original positions in time, and therefore "should have remained in reserve." As you can see, the 3rd Panzer Corps failed to make significant progress. that the P Hungarian Army Corps is not going into operational subordination to the command of the 6th Panzer Army (which, in fact, was At this point it was announced conceived from the very beginning). Being on the northwestern shore of Lake Balaton, he was subordinate to the command of the army group Balka. What made the command of the Army Group "South" make such a strange decision, so far

remains unknown.

At that moment, the headquarters of the II Panzer Corps, by order of the command of the 6th Panzer Army, was moved to the village of Sharszentmihai (southeast of Szekesfehervar). At the same time, [U SS Panzer Corps. His reconnaissance detachments managed to capture some territories northeast of Szekesfehervar. A little to the north, the battles were fought by the 3rd Hungarian Army, which each time more and more difficultly managed to repel Soviet attacks.

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The first day of the Awakening of Spring offensive went extremely badly for the Germans. However, to expect something else was at least frivolous. An erroneous report received from the headquarters of the II Panzer Corps led to the fact that the main "burden" of the offensive fell on the shoulders of other divisions. In the conditions of thaw and the "terrible" landscape, it was necessary to postpone the offensive, which Colonel General Frissner did in his time. But this time there was no such order.

On that day, an entry appeared in the combat log of Army Group South:

"The weather is very unfavorable for the advance of tank units. If the roads and territories have had time to dry out a little over the past days, then new snowfalls and a thaw have again turned them into swamps. The enemy managed to block the main routes with huge minefields and barrage batteries of anti-tank guns. In this weather, it is virtually impossible to outflank them. All this does not allow any effective use of tank units. Due to the limited ammunition and the short duration of the artillery preparation that preceded the offensive, the first strike was forced to take on only infantry units.

By the evening of March 6, 1945, the following situation had developed. On the right flank of the 2nd Panzer Army, German units were able to break through the Soviet defenses, approaching Nagybayom and Kaposvár. In the future, the command of the tank army planned to develop the offensive and move in the direction of Kaposmere. At the same time, the left wing of the 2nd Panzer Army was by no means successful in the offensive. In this area, the Germans were actually unable to capture any significant territories. For this reason, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army decided to shift the center of gravity of the offensive to the southern, right flank. But this intention was limited by the command of Army Group South. As a result, only the 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division was regrouped.

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German 80mm mortar fire on Soviet positions near the Shio Canal

The situation of the 6th Panzer Army can be found in the combat log: "After the evening report provided by the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army, it turned out that [the SS Panzer Corps was able to partially break through the enemy defenses west of Canal Sharviz. He succeeded somewhere

wedge into enemy positions, but since the bulk of the tanks cannot be used, a fundamental breakthrough has not been made anywhere.

Further, the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army reported that the enemy was trying to contract near the coast of Lake Balaton, attacking the right wing of the Panzer Army:

"The enemy also used a new division to counterattack the positions of the cavalry corps. The cavalry corps itself was able to advance only 300 meters on both sides in the direction of the Siofok-Lepshen highway. The enemy is undertaking constant counterattacks from the Enying region. The captured Red Army soldiers testified that they had been informed of their own offensive planned for March 3rd. At 9:50 p.m., in a conversation with the commander of the Army Group, the commander of the 6th Panzer Army stated that in the course of

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On the first day of the offensive, a tank breakthrough was impossible. The condition of the roads is catastrophic. Mud and newly fallen snow worsen their condition even more. The surrounding areas are impassable for tanks. The only paths that tanks could take are blocked by enemy anti-tank fortifications and minefields.

As a result, infantry units are forced to break into the enemy defense line. This suggests protracted fighting, but the commander hopes that the enemy will be weaker than before. The main problem is still artillery ammunition. Since infantry cannot be supported by tanks, it must be supported at least by artillery. Parts of the cavalry corps are forced to abandon. from a frontal attack. This issue is most acute in relation to the territories located to the east of Enying. There, an attack is possible only from the flanks. However, we must wait for the arrival of heavy artillery. Without it, it is hardly possible at all to break through the enemy defense line.

The forces of the III Panzer Corps (Army Group Balka) were still able to capture part of Sheregeyesh by the end of the day. Here, units of the Red Army offered the most fierce resistance to the Germans. The German troops managed to create a small bridgehead one and a half kilometers deep, but it was clearly not enough to fully use the forces of the 3rd Panzer Division. The command of the 111th Panzer Corps feared that, due to the impassability of the approach routes and the lack of vehicles, the delivery of heavy artillery to Sheregeyesh might be delayed. In addition, the 3rd Panzer Division could not, due to mud and poor traffic, be on time at the indicated bridgehead.

For these reasons, the command of the army group Balka intended to use the railway embankment that went from Falubattyán to Sheregeyesh. For tanks and heavy guns to approach along it, it was only necessary to dismantle the rails and sleepers. |

To continue the offensive the next day, the following steps were planned:

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1) On the front along the Drava, it was planned to expand the bridgeheads north of Valpovo and Donji Miholyac;

2) The 2nd Panzer Army was to regroup, but at the same time continue to attack north and south of Nagybayom. The forces that had broken through the Soviet line of defense on the right flank were to take Kaposvár.

3) The command of the 6th Panzer Army was to:

— to regroup the forces of the cavalry corps, which was driven back to their original positions. In the course of his forthcoming offensive, it was necessary to take Enying and move in the direction of Meso Komárom;

- The SS Panzer Corps was to advance in the same direction towards Degu, while blocking the Soviet positions in Calosa;

- The SS Panzer Corps was supposed to advance in the direction of Sharkerestur and Saroshd, cutting off the Soviet units in Abe from the main forces.

4) The command of the army group Balka was to expand the bridgehead near Sheregeyesh, clear the nearby territories of the remnants of Soviet troops and launch an offensive in two directions: to the southeast in the direction of Perkata and to the north in the direction of Dinnyesh. After that, part of the German troops was to be released to strike between the Danube and Lake Velence.

Around midnight, General Wöhler contacted Colonel General Guderian, to whom he described the results of the first day of the offensive as follows:

— "I am dissatisfied with today's events. But mud and sleet did their nefarious deed.

We can hardly use our tank troops. Tanks cannot move across the terrain, and all roads are blocked or covered by minefields. Therefore, only the infantry advances. What happened was what was to be expected. The infantry was unable to provide an instant breakthrough. Moreover, in fierce battles, she almost completely spent her ammunition. Soon the soldiers will be left without bullets. The enemy was expecting our offensive, and just as powerful as we had planned. However, he did not know the time and place. The pain itself

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For him, the forcing of the Drava was a surprise. Perhaps this is the biggest success. Thus, it was possible to create a foothold on the northern bank without encountering almost any enemy resistance. But at the same time, the 2nd Panzer Army faced forces that were significantly superior to it. The advance between the two lakes is very slow. Particularly disappointing is the fact that the II SS Panzer Corps could not enter the battle in full force.

During this conversation, General Wöhler openly accused the command of the 6th Panzer Army of, if not sabotaging his orders, then at least misinforming the headquarters of the army group about the timing of the start of the offensive. This phrase was largely due to the fact that Sepp Dietrich tried to stand up for the officers of the II Panzer Corps. In response, Guderian only demanded that the offensive be launched in full force as soon as possible. |

After the direction of the main attack became known to the Soviet command (on both sides of the Sharviz Canal), the commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, Marshal F.I. Tolbukhin took retaliatory measures:

- The 18th Tank Corps, which was in reserve, was to be used south of Sheregeyesh;
- The 27th Rifle Army, which was in the second echelon of defense, was to be sent to the sector between Sharviz and Lake Velence;
- The 133rd Rifle Corps, which was used as an operational reserve, was to be transferred from the southern shores of Lake Balaton to the northeast.

All these measures made it possible to significantly strengthen the Soviet defense, which was not noticed by the German command.

March 7, 1945 (Wednesday). Second day of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is up to 4 °C above zero. The weather is changeable. Light snowfall. Unfortified roads and open terrain are washed out." |

As soon as flying weather set in, the German pilots began to attack the Soviet supply lines. To supply the hour

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The 3rd Ukrainian Front built a cable car across the Danube. By this time, almost all bridges had been destroyed during the fighting, and due to the beginning of ice drift, transportation by river boats was very risky. In those days uniform air battles unfolded over the Danube. However, the official Soviet historiography preferred to keep silent about these battles, mentioning only the drift of ice. It was he who called himself the main reason for the destruction of eight pontoon bridges, each of which had a carrying capacity of 10 to 60 tons. One way or another, from 1200 tons of cargo were transported daily by cable car to the western bank of the Danube. First of all, it was ammunition. Fuel, however, was preferred to be transported through a kind of pipeline.

As mentioned above, on the second day of the German offensive, the Soviet defense not only did not weaken, but became even stronger. Everywhere, units of the Red Army launched more or less successful counterattacks. Often the Red Army soldiers were supported by tanks. The Germans wrote about this: "The second day of the offensive, in fact, like the first, was difficult for the infantry. Snowfalls and thaws, followed by short frosts, were the best suited for defense, but did not contribute to our offensive at all.

But the main enemy in the command of the 6th Panzer Army at that time was still considered mud and swamp. They prevented the delivery of heavy artillery, which was supposed to support the German infantry, better than any Soviet aviation. The breakthrough of the Soviet defense was in danger of failing without actually starting. The Germans could only boast of expanding their bridgeheads on the banks of the Drava, but even this happened only because the Red Army units did not

Herman Pris, Commander | SS Panzer Corps created deep echelons here

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forged defensive lines. However, this did not mean that nothing was being done. During the night, the Soviet units were able to create a defensive line near the bridgehead north of Valpovo. In addition, the Germans failed to build bridges across the Drava. Each attempt was thwarted by Soviet gunners. This circumstance forced the command of the Army Group "South" to demand from the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast to change the direction of the main attack, shifting it from Mohacs somewhat to the west, closer to Pec. In this case, the German units crossing the Drava could interact with the 2nd Panzer Army. But this proposal was not accepted, since the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast believed that this maneuver would expose the eastern flank of the advancing units.

At that time, the 2nd Panzer Army was never able to achieve success on its left flank. The forces gradually regrouped on the right flank, south of Nagybayom. It was there that the 71st Infantry Division and the 16th SS Pan-Pergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" were sent. They entered the battle at 11 o'clock, but, despite all efforts, they failed to fundamentally turn the tide and capture significant territories. They made only slight progress to the northeast of Nagybayom. |

In the evening, at 5:25 p.m., the command of the 2nd Panzer Army officially announced its desire to regroup troops, since the continuation of the frontal offensive did not bode well. A breakthrough was needed at the weakest point of the Soviet defense. The command of the 2nd Panzer Army saw such a one on the southeastern flank of the Bulgarian army, near Cheköl. At the headquarters of the Army Group "South" they again refused - the offensive had to be continued in the same direction. "There is nothing good in the fact that the army will regroup troops every day."

But a few hours later, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army repeated its request again. This time it backed it up with Soviet maps found on a captured Red Army officer. The point is that these maps showed a system of Soviet defensive fortifications. It was proposed to strike in a southeasterly direction, from where it was possible to turn north again.

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east towards Kaposvár. But General Wöhler reiterated that the offensive had to be continued in the direction of the Nagybayom-Kaposvár highway, that is, to maintain the same direction. If this task had been completed, then the 2nd Panzer Army could have regrouped already on a new, more advantageous bridgehead.

Failure pursued both the 6th Panzer Army and the Shtankovy Corps (Army Group Balka), which continued to fight unsuccessfully in the area between Lakes Balaton and Velence. The Soviet troops here did not intend to retreat a single step. Moreover, German intelligence reported to the headquarters that about 80 Soviet trucks with reinforcements were heading from Degas to Enying. Shoponia, held by three battalions of the Red Army, was also too tough for the German units.

If we talk about the offensive [of the cavalry corps, then the 4th cavalry division could not advance a meter, and the 3rd cavalry division captured only a little body territories. The latter, in particular, took Hill 163, located east of Enying. It was here that the cavalrymen were able to close positions with units of the [SS Panzer Corps.]

Only the SS Panzer Corps succeeded in pushing back the Soviet units. The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" (on the maps it was indicated by the old code name - "Ersatz-Team SS" Viking ") was able to capture the village of Yoden the day before. The next day (i.e. March 7) she was able to advance to the line of the village of Fekete - the village of Aranyosh (southeast of height 163).

The 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" (SS ersatz team "Totenkopf") bypassed the town of Kaloz from the west, cut it off from the highway connecting with Simontornja, after which it circled the settlement and struck from the south. During the fierce battles for Kaloz, the Germans still managed to capture it. A well-built Soviet defense proved helpless against a simple maneuver and a strike from the rear. The Soviet units defeated here in small detachments tried to break through to the east. But not everyone managed to escape from this swampy terrain.

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Tank destroyers from the "Leibstandarte" in battle

By evening, the first tactical successes began to appear on the account of the II SS Panzer Corps. German tankers, attacking east of Sharviz, were able to break through the Soviet anti-tank barriers. Attack aircraft of the Luftwaffe took an active part in the destruction of the Soviet "anti-tank nests". It is possible that it was thanks to air support that the SS Panzer Divisions managed to penetrate 6 kilometers deep into the Soviet positions.

By that time, the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" was able to break through northwest of Aba. It was at this moment that the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" was fighting 4 kilometers west of Saroszd, and the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" captured one after another the estates southwest of Sheregeyesh. During this offensive, German tank divisions cut the road connecting Sheregeyesh with Sharoshd. Compared to the previous day, this was an undeniable tactical success.

In the evening, a traditional meeting was held at the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army. Despite previous difficulties, Sepp Dietrich was filled with confidence that the next

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The next day will be able to crush the Soviet defenses and make the long-awaited breakthrough. At 9:10 p.m., Dietrich spoke with the commander of Army Group South. In the conversation, he emphasized that "the 6th army intended to break through to the south to Shimontornya and Kaloz, capturing a significant part of the territories on the western bank of Sharviz." But at the same time, he did not rule out that the Soviet command could attempt a flank counterattack, and therefore asked to induce the Balka army group to speed up the attack on Adon, which ruled out the possibility of a flank strike that was very dangerous for the SS Panzer divisions. |

From the very beginning of the operation, the command of the 6th Panzer Army watched the events on its left flank with caution. It was for this reason that Sepp Dietrich maintained constant contact with the command of the [SS Panzer Corps. He wanted to know about any changes in the balance of power north of Lake Velence. He understood that the presence of a powerful Soviet group almost in the rear was a sword of Damocles for the 6th Panzer Army.

Sepp Dietrich's indication of the need for the army group Balka to advance was not accidental. Despite the previous advance, on March 7, the 3rd Panzer Corps could not fulfill its tasks, even when the active offensive of the 11th SS Panzer Corps reduced Soviet pressure on this sector of the front: "For the whole day they did not take any one real attempt to attack Sheregeyesh. All day the army group was busy repairing roads and building bridges, and therefore only local battles were fought. One could consider this a petty revenge on Balk, who constantly slandered the SS command. Now it's time for General Bulk to justify himself. In an evening conversation with the commander of the army group, he stated that "even tomorrow, the 3rd Panzer Corps will not be able to launch an offensive against Sheregeyesh, because the bridges necessary for this will not be ready due to the slow delivery of building materials." As a kind of reassurance, he assured that there had not yet been a concentration of significant forces of the Red Army, which "apparently has not yet recovered from the previous

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Start of the offensive

blows." And he continued: "As soon as the weather improves, we will have an undoubted success." It is indicative, but Guderian himself did not strongly object to the temporary suspension of the advance of the forces of the Shtankov corps.

That same evening, the commander of Army Group South, in a conversation with the chief of the operations department of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, stated that "there are all signs that the enemy is beginning to weaken." As confirmation of this, information was given about the use of operational reserves by the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. In principle, this argument, as well as the hope for better weather, which has become the most important strategic factor, was an ordinary self-deception.

The conversation between General Wöhler and Guderian looked approximately the same way: "It can be assumed that the enemy forces have already been defeated. He has not used his operational reserves yet, but they are already on the front lines." At the same time, the exclusive use of infantry the day before became a kind of trump card. Like, we still had tank divisions involved in the battles, which could very quickly break through to the east. At the same time, Wöhler himself did not hide the fact that he was very disappointed with the actions of the 2nd Panzer Army (which, by the way, was under his own command). He believed that due to the regrouping, the offensive was carried out very slowly.

_ Another remarkable fact. Wöhler never informed Sepp Dietrich that even on March 8 army group Balka

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will not take active offensive actions. Although by the evening he was well aware of this. Only a few reconnaissance sorties were planned for that day by the forces of the 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking", which, at best, could end in minor tactical successes in the Szekesfehervar area. The rest of the army group Balka was to focus on repelling several Soviet attacks near the "northern" bend of the Danube.

\$ March 1945 (Thursday). Third day of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is about 0 °C. The weather is changeable. There is light snow in places. Somewhere there is fog. In the early hours, when it is still frosty, the condition of the roads is satisfactory, but with the onset of the day it deteriorates again.

This day was marked by the fact that the American bombers attacked with Komar. Western Allied aircraft have been flying into the airspace over Army Group South since the beginning of the year, but as a rule, these were not organized raids. The Americans, most likely, got rid of extra bombs. This time the situation was somewhat different. The bombers deliberately bombed precisely these objects in cooperation with Soviet aviation. Actually, there were not so many American bombers, only four, and the bombing itself was just a "goodwill gesture", but this gesture was very

symbolic.

Meanwhile, the Soviet command, having revealed the plans of the Germans, continued to take emergency measures. From the area southwest of Budapest, one division was transferred to the Drava, to the German bridgehead at Donji Miholyac. Another division was sent to Nagybayom. It was followed by another formation, which was supposed to attack the western wing of the German cavalry corps on the shores of Lake Balaton. At that time, the greatest threat, according to the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, was a possible breakthrough of German units from the area of Sharoshda and Sheregeyesh to the banks of the Danube. The Red Army under no circumstances should have lost its foothold at Dunaföldvár, which was of great importance.

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nie in the supply of parts of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. If the Germans were able to break through the powerful line of defense on the heights near Saroshd, it was planned to urgently transfer the XNUMXth tank corps to this area. Meanwhile, tank battles had already begun at Sharoshd and Sheregeyesh. If we consider individual sections of the battle, then we can say that the units of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast did not manage to expand their bridgeheads on the northern bank of the Drava. They were constantly under fire from the Soviet artillery. Bombs rained down on them day and night and they were attacked by Soviet attack aircraft. The only result achieved here was the withdrawal of a number of Soviet units from near Budapest. But the Germans had no prerequisites for launching a strategic offensive in this direction. In addition to the Bulgarian army, in this sector of the front, the Germans were attacked from the flanks by two partisan divisions of Tito. The German command was afraid that if the 6th Soviet tank army was sent to this area, then the bridgeheads along the Drava would be instantly liquidated. And this meant that the "big decision" on the western bank of the Danube (regardless of the success or defeat of the 2nd and 6th tank armies in the north) collapsed. The continued offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army did not bring any results either. However, it was very difficult to call these battles an offensive. Having concentrated considerable forces, the Germans were able to capture only 1.5 kilometers south of Lake Balaton. And this is in the area where they wedged themselves into the Soviet positions as deeply as possible! However, the Red Army failed to turn the tide. To the north of Nagybayom, near the town of Martsali, the Soviet troops launched several counterattacks. All of them were unsuccessful - the Germans were able to repel them. Although the transition of the Germans to the defense was also a significant event. It was noted that the losses of the 2nd Panzer Army were so great that it actually had no strength left to continuously attack the Soviet defense line. Army Group Headquarters was constantly bombarded with reports of unplanned

high losses and a very high level of ammunition consumption. "The advanced units have already lost up to one quarter of their combat strength."

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For this reason, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army again came up with a proposal to change the direction of the offensive. This time it was to be aimed further south. After lengthy consultations, Colonel General Guderian nevertheless approved this change in the direction of attack. The command of the 2nd Panzer Army was notified of this at 0:30 (already March 9). In response, the command of the tank army reported that it needed a day to carry out the regrouping, and therefore the offensive could not start again until the first half of March 10th. As you can see, the offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army south of Lake Balaton did not lead to the expected "unloading" of the northern territories. Soviet troops were able to cope with this offensive without actually transferring large military formations from Sharviz and Lake Velence. As a result, the 6th German Panzer Army took the main blow. She had to not only break through in fierce battles through the powerful Soviet defenses, but also "rescue" her southern "partners" (2nd Army and divisions of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast). The situation was completely different from what was originally planned. It was not secondary strikes that pulled the Soviet troops away from the 6th Panzer Army, but the 6th Panzer Army accumulated Red Army divisions around itself, preventing them from instantly liquidating the bridgeheads in the south.

They are trying to tow a wrecked German tank in snowy slush

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For the 6th Panzer Army itself, this day was more favorable than the previous two. In essence, only parts of the [cavalry corps] remained in their former positions. The 3rd Cavalry Division was able to regroup, which could allow them to continue their advance. After passages were made in the Soviet minefields, at 9 pm, simultaneously with the SS Panzer Corps, it launched a surprise offensive.

By the evening of the same day, the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitlerjugend" reached the area located northwest of Degas, after which they cut the road leading to Enying. The 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" fought fierce battles in the area of Shoponya, intending to go behind Degu and strike from the opposite side. Even at night [the tank corps continued to advance in a southerly direction. The offensive of the II Corps got stuck in the Soviet defense in depth along the Aba-Sharoshd line. Despite the support of the Luftwaffe, the Germans could not move forward. Equally unsuccessful were the attempts to advance the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", which was located just to the north. At some point, the "imperials" had to go on the defensive, from the Aba area they were attacked by two Soviet battalions supported by tanks.

The SS Panzer divisions "Reich" and "Hohenstaufen", due to strong Soviet artillery fire from the flanks, could not move forward through the territory west of Saroszd for a long time. The situation was not changed by the bombardment of these positions by the Luftwaffe. Already in the evening, at 1915 hours, the offensive of these divisions in the direction of Charkerestur was resumed. In general, the successes of the 6th Panzer Army, which were reported in the evening report, were limited to a breakthrough, which was carried out by forces of the SS Panzer Corps. The immediate plans of his command were to advance along the Sharviz Canal to Shoponya and Kaloz, which opened the way for an offensive on Tsetse.

At the same time, the command of the Army Group "South" insisted that the forces of the 1st Cavalry Corps should not be used without unnecessary need, since they could be used up ahead of time, and they still had to perform

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thread an important tactical task. In response, the command of the 6th Panzer Army reported that they were "protecting the cavalry corps", and the aces planned to carry out the breakthrough exclusively with tank units. | |

At the same time, Sepp Dietrich was watching with concern the exposed left flank of his army. Even more worrying was the fact that this flank could become his "Achilles' heel", as he planned to transfer most of the II Panzer Corps after the I Panzer Corps to the Calosa area. It was in this place that Dietrich intended to break through the line of the Soviet defense and through this breakthrough to begin the deployment of his tank divisions.

At that moment, the 3rd Panzer Corps (Army Group Balka) was able to take Sheregeyesh after fierce fighting. But the rest of it was a failure. On the territories adjacent to the city, the army tankers were able to advance only a couple of kilometers, which, naturally, did not cover the northern flank of the 6th Panzer Army.

The GU Tank Corps of the SS that day, like the rest of the units from the Danube to the Vertesh mountains, did not report any active actions. He fought local battles, which for the most part were limited to reconnaissance sorties and artillery duels with the Soviet side. It is noteworthy that on that day the following entry was made in the combat log of the Wehrmacht High Command: "Army Group South: no significant changes. 2nd Panzer Army reflects counterattacks. At the front along the Drava River... the bridgehead at Valpovo was expanded by 2 kilometers. The enemy is attacking here. The crossing of the river is carried out on two 8-ton ferries. It is threatened by enemy artillery batteries... The 8th Army is fighting near Shemnitz." And not a single word about the 6th Panzer Army. Obviously, the High Command of the Wehrmacht did not consider that she played a central role in the "slow decision" on the west bank of the Danube.

When in the evening the command of the 6th Panzer Army announced its plans for the near future, Lieutenant General Grolman pointed out that "breakthroughs and attacks should be used for advancing forward, and not for curtailing

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right and left, as happened with Degas. A remarkably stupid phrase. The staff officer obviously did not understand that a well-fortified city could not be taken by a frontal attack. In general, it was very naive to count on the fact that the offensive of tank troops on a broad front could end in success.

To continue the offensive, the following tasks were planned:

- 1) The commander-in-chief in the southeast was to repel all Soviet counterattacks and try to expand the bridgeheads along the Drava River;
- 2) The 2nd Panzer Army was supposed to move the spearhead of its offensive somewhat to the south, which would allow it to hit the flank of the | th Bulgarian Army, which was considered less combat-ready than the Red Army - only one day was given to regroup;
- 3) 6th Panzer Army:
 - a) the forces [of the tank and cavalry corps were to align the right flank of the tank army, continuing to advance in the direction of the Shio Canal;

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On the banks of the Sharviz Canal

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B) the 25th Hungarian infantry division was supposed to take part in this offensive, being at the junction of the cavalry and tank corps;

c) Panzer Corps was to continue the offensive towards Sharkerestour, paving the way to the south-east;

a) The 23rd division was to take up positions behind the 44th imperial grenadier division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", and then act according to the situation.

4) The offensive of the 3rd Panzer Corps (army group Balka) was planned in the direction of Adoni to the Danube, as well as by some units in a northeasterly direction between the Danube and Lake Velence.

Toward midnight, General Wöhler contacted Guderian. In his report, he mentioned the following intelligence:

"The enemy pulled up a tank corps to Sharoshd XUSH. According to various sources, its strength is from 60 to 150 tanks. It is very strange that other mobile units of the enemy did not appear in this area. It remains unclear where the UP Guards Mechanized Corps is located. There is an active movement between Budapest and Dunaféjöldvár. It can be assumed that the enemy is moving his units from under Lake Velence to the south, although this information is only an assumption and has not been verified.

In fact, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front reinforced the artillery units that were on the front line. The density of artillery fire especially increased on the southern shores of Lake Balaton. On the second day of Operation Spring Awakening, it tripled (compared to the previous days), and by March 8 it quadrupled.

March 9, 1945 (Friday). Fourth day of Operation Spring Awakening

"The night is cold. During the day the temperature reaches 0°C. Cloudy and windy. There is light snow in places. The passability of unfortified roads is improving."

Those minor tactical successes that the German divisions managed to achieve at the Drava and the 2nd Panzer Army

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off the southern shores of Balaton, were nullified by Soviet counterattacks. However, at Balaton, the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer", with the support of the people's mountain division, managed to move forward somewhat in the direction of Nagybayom, but they were still separated from the city by 4 kilometers, which under the circumstances was almost a fantastic distance. A stalemate developed: the Germans could not break through the Soviet defenses, but the Red Army units were also unable to launch a powerful counteroffensive to sweep away German divisions.

Under these conditions, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army requested another 24 hours from Army Group South to complete the regrouping that had begun. However, General Wöhler did not grant such a reprieve. Until Dietrich's 6th Panzer Army had penetrated far enough to the south, the 2nd Panzer Army had to take active offensive actions. The planned offensive in a new, more southerly direction was bound to begin on the morning of March 10th.

As a result, the command of the tank army was forced to adopt the following plan. On March 10, at 11 o'clock, the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer", with the support of the 71st Infantry Division, should launch an attack on Nagykorpad, outflanking Kutash and Kish-Bayom. The headquarters of Army Group South found that this plan had many weaknesses. In addition, the tactical objective of the offensive "was too close", and therefore could only be a task for the first action. The offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army was to be deeper.

The command of the 6th Army was already planning to succeed west of the Sharviz Canal: "I Cavalry Corps and | the SS Panzer Corps could advance deep to the south, where enemy positions were scattered. As a result, it is planned to occupy the heights north of the Shio Canal."

The left (inner) wing of the 1st Cavalry Corps, formed by the 3rd Cavalry Division, really advanced very actively. The Germans managed not only to break through the Soviet defenses, but also to capture many Red Army soldiers and capture many captured weapons. The entire Deg-Enying highway was in the hands of the Germans.

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At the same time, the 4th Cavalry Division was unable to develop such a rapid offensive. Its units were still fighting on the northern approaches to Enying. In the middle of the day, the command of the cavalry corps received an order to develop an offensive on Mezo Komarom, after which, having leveled the front, to connect with the advanced units of the 1st SS Panzer Corps. |

_ The units of the 1st Panzer Corps themselves continued to develop the offensive, capturing more and more new-territories. The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" rushed to the town of Ozora, which stood on the Shio Canal. Its swift advance was stopped only by vast Soviet minefields. In addition, moving away from Degas, problems with the wetlands again began to be felt. By evening, the division, which had slowed down, could only reach the heights near Silash Balkhash.

At this time, the Leibstandarte division, which had captured the village of Janoschaza with an energetic throw, was trying to break through the anti-tank fortifications near Shimontornya. But this was not an easy task, as the Soviet artillery fired accurately at the German tanks from the opposite, higher bank of the Shio. In addition, the positions of the "Leibstandarte" were very risky, since the division was unable to capture the villages of Khusar and Fanch located in the rear along the flanks. There are still bloody battles going on.

The open left flank of the 1st Panzer Corps, stretching for almost 20 kilometers, caused more and more concern for Sepp Dietrich. In this situation, the rapid advance of the German tankers could turn into a military disaster for them. A successful counterattack launched by Red Army units from the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal could cut off the forward units of the Leibstandarte. To avoid such a development of events, the 403rd People's Artillery Corps was transferred from Degas. Here, he could perform two tasks simultaneously: to fire at the Soviet positions, which were advancing by the II SS Panzer Corps, and to cover the left flank of the I SS Panzer Corps, preventing a possible Soviet counterattack. But this was clearly not enough. That is why Sepp Dietrich demanded from the command of Army Group South to transfer to the canal area

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Sharviz 23rd Panzer Division. She was to develop an offensive on Tsetse, from where, with joint forces, it would be possible to break through to Dunafeldvar. Theoretically, this corresponded to Guderian's instructions, but in practice it provided powerful flank cover for the 1st SS Panzer Corps. In addition, under these conditions, it would be possible to develop an offensive not only to the south, but also to the east - in the direction of Scharbogard. In this situation, the eastern coast of Sharviz would have been captured not by a thrust from the north, but by a tank attack from the west. Dietrich almost had no doubts about the possibility of implementing this plan, and therefore he brought construction battalions in advance, which were supposed to build bridges across the Sharviz.

There was every reason to believe that the eastern coast of Sharviz could hardly be captured by a jerk from the north. Thus, for example, Major-General of the Waffen-SS Kremer believed that the current situation could hardly have gone any further than Scharosdl. In this situation, he hoped that forcing the canal much further south would make it possible to deliver a blow from the rear to the units of the Red Army fighting in the area. Only under these conditions, Part II

tank corps could try to break through the Soviet defenses on the eastern bank of the Sharviz. The headquarters of Army Group South agreed with the above arguments. In order to discuss the details of this operation, General Wöhler even personally went to the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army. But at the same time, Guderian expressed slight bewilderment why both SS panzer corps were involved in battles for a small area of country bounded by Deg and Enying. He was even more amazed why the offensive of both corps developed in the south, and not in the south-west direction (towards the Danube). In response, Lieutenant General Grolman explained that the direction of the offensive was predetermined by the characteristics of the territory at this time of the year. "However, the tank army intends to maintain the originally planned direction of attack."

This conversation shows that in the High Command of the Ground Forces, until now, it was not very clear what difficulties the local landscape presented during the winter thaw. And because "above" did not even allow the thought

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that tank corps could not be used according to the "classical formula". Something similar could be said about the High Command of the Wehrmacht, with the exception that they did not even try to understand the current situation.

Meanwhile, units of the II SS Panzer Corps approached the main Soviet defensive line, which was literally stuffed with anti-tank mines and special barriers. Parts of the Red Army, despite high losses, continued to fiercely resist the advance of the Germans forward. But the Germans themselves suffered much greater losses. In fruitless attacks, almost half of the combat strength of the German infantry divisions was destroyed. For this reason, the command of the II SS Panzer Corps decided to shift the center of its offensive to the right flank, thus covering the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order". Anticipating such a development of events, the Soviet units launched several desperate counterattacks, inflicting a tank attack from the east on the positions of the SS Panzer Corps. The Germans managed to repulse them, but nevertheless the Red Army managed to recapture the territories lying to the west of Szaroshd. In this situation, it could be considered a tactical success. To remedy the situation, units of the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division were forced to advance on Sharkerestur. Otherwise, units of the SS Panzer Corps could not resume their offensive. On top of that, the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" lost its commander that day. On the way from the division headquarters, a light all-terrain vehicle, in which the division commander was located, was hit by a shell. The officer accompanying the division commander died immediately. Lieutenant General Ostendorf of the Waffen-SS himself was seriously wounded. He died on 1 May in the military hospital in Bad Ischl. Already in the last days of the war, on May 6, 1945, he was posthumously awarded the Oak Leaves to the Knight's Cross. At first, the command of the division was taken over by the commander of the artillery regiment, Standartenführer Waffen-SS Kreutz.

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At about 12 o'clock, the command of the 6th Panzer Army informed the headquarters of the army group about their further intentions: "The SS Panzer Corps with the forces of the regiment can attack on the western bank of the Sharviz Canal, between Shoponya and Kaloz, which will eventually allow the formation of a bridgehead, from which it will be possible to attack from the flank the enemy, located on the banks of the canal at Sharkerestur. In the second half of the day the offensive continued again | Cavalry Corps and [SS Panzer Corps. At 1530 hours, cavalymen from the 4th division were able to break through to the outskirts of Enying. Units of the 3rd Cavalry Division attacked on the heights just northwest of Meze Komarom.

The 12th Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" cut the road Deg - Ozora, which passed west of Silash-Balkhash. This settlement continued to be held by units of the Red Army. Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" fought on the heights north of Szymontornya, where

Soviet units had very advantageous positions. Here was a well-fortified defensive line, which stretched from Shar-Egresh to Tsetse. The fact that a significant number of Soviet anti-tank guns was concentrated here also added to the difficulty for the German tankers. The results of the offensive were reported to Army Group South at 17:15:

"The command of the 6th Panzer Army believes that the enemy was able to build powerful anti-tank fortifications in this direction, which are held near Shimontornya not only by infantry and numerous anti-tank guns, but also by powerful artillery fire from the southern bank of the canal. In addition, it was possible to observe a busy movement of enemy units in a south-western direction towards Simontornje and east of Tsetse. It would be expedient to send units of the 23rd Panzer Division and the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" to this sector. On the western bank of the canal, it is necessary to transfer the battle group of the 11th SS Panzer Corps so that it develops an offensive in the direction of Kaloz and continues

move east."

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At the same time, the chief of staff of the 6th Panzer Army came up with the idea that the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division should join the cavalry corps and start advancing along the shore of Lake Balaton. With the help of the Hungarians, it was supposed to stabilize the front from Balaton to Enying. At the same time, parts of the cavalry corps had to move purely to the south, to Ozor. |

In response to this proposal, the command of Army Group South authorized the temporary use of the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division to clear the area around Enying. At the same time, it was not excluded that the offensive along the shore of Lake Balaton was to be carried out by the forces of two Hungarian battalions; which were part of the army group Balka. However, this did not take place, as Balk warned that "the Hungarians are pathologically incapable of carrying out this task." However, he himself did not mind that the battalions were transferred under the command of the cavalry corps. In this situation, the command of the 6th Panzer Army preferred to refuse such a "gift". As a result, the Hungarian battalions were transferred to the reserve in positions near Enying.

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Tank destroyer from the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte"

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Meanwhile, the Soviet command launched Cossack units near Shimontornya. Upon learning of this, the German command reasonably came to the conclusion that the 5th Soviet cavalry corps had been transferred to the front line. As a result, it was decided that the units of the 23rd Panzer Division, as well as the entire [SS Panzer Corps,] were to be concentrated on the EAST bank of the Sharviz Canal in order to prevent Soviet troops from encircling the "locked" under Sharoshdom P SS Panzer Corps. The German generals did not rule out the possibility that at the moment the Soviet command would transfer the XNUMXth tank corps to this sector of the front, which was supposed to attack the SS men on both sides of SzaroszdI.

On that day, the 3rd Panzer Corps actually did not move forward. Only the 1st Panzer Division managed to develop the offensive, but its success was also very relative. During these hostilities, the Sheregeyesha bridge was captured. It happened literally on the eve of the onset of darkness.

notes, so that at 18:15, units of the 3rd Panzer Division could begin to form bridgeheads on both banks of the canal. In the early morning of the upcoming day of Operation Spring Awakening, the offensive was to continue eastward from here.

Actually, the 3rd Panzer Corps advanced in two directions—east and northeast. As a result, the command of the army group Balka proposed to establish an offensive front along the line of Lake Velence - Lovashberen. There, the SS Panzer Corps (Death's Head and Viking divisions), reinforced by the 6th Panzer Division, could launch an offensive north of Szekesfehervar. This was supposed to prevent the Soviet command from freely operating in the territories adjacent to Budapest from the west and southwest. The fact that in this situation it was an old and rejected plan did not bother either Bulk or his chief of staff Gödke. In addition, it remains unclear why the SS PU Panzer Corps was taken into account, whose forces could hardly be used for a successful offensive against the several times superior units of the Red Army. The command of the 6th Panzer Army reacted without ent

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ziasma to this venture. For Sepp Dietrich, the intention to send a weakened [U] tank corps from a specially prepared defensive line near Szekesfehervar somewhere to the east, to the front line, was tantamount to suicide. Not surprisingly, General Gille of the Waffen-SS also held a similar point of view. He foresaw the inglorious end of this tactical adventure.

At 9:35 p.m., General Wehler contacted Colonel General Guderian and gave him plans for the development of the offensive for the next day:

- 1) The Leibstandarte and Hitler Youth divisions, together with the 1st Cavalry Corps, must urgently create bridgeheads on the banks of the Shio Canal northwest of Mezo-Komarom, Ozora and Shimontornya.
- 2) The 25th Hungarian Infantry Division should change the positions of the 1st Cavalry Corps in order for them to launch an offensive in a southerly direction.
- 3) The 23rd Panzer Division should follow the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte", in order to subsequently launch an offensive and create an offensive bridgehead on the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal near Shar Egres, which will open the way for the offensive of the 11th SS Panzer Corps on Dunafejoldvar.
- 4) With the same aim, the SS Panzer Corps Combat Group P is to launch offensive operations on the western bank of the Sharviz Canal between Shoponya and Kaloz. These actions will make it possible to support the offensive of the main forces of the SS Panzer Corps with a strike from the south. Subsequently, the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" should also launch an attack on Kaloz.
- 5) For the coming day, the army group Balka should plan an offensive in the east and northeast directions from the bridgehead formed near Sheregeyesh.
- 6) In addition, the army group Balka is to prepare an offensive by the GU Panzer Corps north of Szekesfehervar, which will gradually move eastward. In contrast to the previously proposed reinforcement [At the SS Panzer Corps, 6th Panzer Division, this was no longer supposed to be done. She should have

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to remain an operational reserve, which at any moment could be required in any direction of attack.

To the great surprise of Gille and Sepp Dietrich, Colonel-General Guderian almost immediately agreed with the idea of using the IV SS Panzer Corps in the offensive. General Wöhler (not without malice) explained this decision by the fact that the II SS Panzer Corps could not achieve tangible results in breaking through the former Soviet defensive lines: "In the conditions when the Soviet 18th Panzer corps, you don't stand a chance."

The most striking thing was that the High Command of the Wehrmacht at that time was considering the possibility of developing a ("main") offensive along the Drava River, which was to be crowned with success after the next 48 hours in the north was finally the Soviet resistance was broken. In the combat log of the Wehrmacht High Command, at the same time, not a single word mentions the battles fought by the 6th Panzer Army. This once again clearly shows that the High Command of the Wehrmacht did not have a real idea (or did not want to have) as to where the main battles were unfolding near Lake Balaton.

Loading ammunition in one of the Hungarian villages

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At the same time, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front began to concentrate fresh Soviet units on the second echelon of defensive structures. Shortly before this, the 9th Guards Army was re-formed southwest of Budapest (it mainly consisted of rifle divisions). It was supposed to be used for an attack on Vienna (Vienna Offensive Operation), but Marshal Tolbukhin petitioned Stalin to leave her for defensive battles. The headquarters refused Tolbukhin. On the same day, a directive was issued that provided for the use of new formations not for defense, but exclusively for the offensive. They were supposed to go on the offensive no later than March 15-16, 1945. However, the Stavka allowed the use of these fresh forces to defeat the advancing German units near Lake Balaton, which was to become a strategic prerequisite for an attack on Vienna.

March 10, 1945 (Saturday). Fifth day of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is again hovering around 0 °C. The sky is covered with a dense layer of clouds, it is snowing and raining. The condition of the territories and roads is deteriorating right before our eyes. They again turn into a swamp and a quagmire.

Just the day before, the command of Army Group South and the command of the 6th Panzer Army hoped that the weather would improve, and therefore the roads and adjacent territories would dry out and become more passable for vehicles. At the very least, tanks and assault guns could be used with might and main. But a sharp change in the weather put an end to all these plans and crossed out all hopes. Even the very name of the operation, Spring Awakening, looked like some kind of ironic strategic grin.

While the 91st Army Corps of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast was trying to somehow gain a foothold on the bridgeheads along the Drava River, the 2nd Panzer Army began its diversion of Lake Balaton. In principle, maneuver at the southern end as this operation was necessary, so the Soviet troops could at any moment drop the German units into

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Draw. As previously assumed, the 71st Infantry Division and the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" took part in the distraction offensive. Both of these formations were to strike somewhat to the south than all previous attempts had been made. It can be said right away that they failed to achieve a stunning tactical success. By the end of the day, the German divisions, which had to repel more than one Soviet counterattack, managed to advance only 5 kilometers deep into the positions of the Red Army. This happened mainly near Kish-Bayom. However, even this relative success of the Germans allowed them

expand your offensive. But all this was compensated by the fact that in the remaining sectors of the front near the southern end of Balaton, the Germans each time more and more difficultly managed to repel Soviet tank attacks. As a result, the 2nd German Panzer Army, instead of the planned offensive (with the exception of one sector), went on the defensive.

On the fifth day of the offensive, no success was foreseen for the 6th Panzer Army. Dirt and the ubiquitous swamp did not allow the use of the striking force of the army - tanks. Under these conditions, the importance of the infantry increased again. Therefore, the appearance of the 25th Hungarian infantry division on the front lines turned out to be very useful for the Germans. All day the Hungarians fought for Enying, which turned out to be taken by them by the end of the day. Toward nightfall, the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division, subordinate to the [cavalry corps,] was able to reach the heights located outside this settlement. Under these conditions, the actual cavalry units continued their offensive in a southerly direction. The 3rd Cavalry Division, reinforced by the 4th Cavalry Division's battle group, was able to reach Mesy Komarom. In addition, she was able to push back Soviet troops from the heights along the Shiio bank, located a little to the west. But this did not yet mean a successful German offensive along the entire Shio Canal. Moreover, the command of the 1st Cavalry Corps was ordered not to delay at each fortified point, which was held by the Red Army, but to move forward as quickly as possible in a north-western direction from Meze Komarom. Under these conditions, the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division had to

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step from Enying to Siofok, and then to the village of Sabadi. At the same time, the 1st SS Panzer Corps, to which the 23rd Panzer Division was subordinated, had to rapidly move forward, eliminating the Soviet defensive lines along the eastern part of Shio (in Ozor, Shimontornje, Sar-Egres). On this occasion, the war diary of Army Group South reported:

"Here the enemy seeks to concentrate significant forces on the defensive lines, using Simontornja and Ozora as the main strongholds. Here they have planned a breakthrough, for which numerous counterattacks are being made on Janoshaza, which allows them to hold the road linking Simontornja and Tsetse. So far, all enemy counterattacks have been successfully repelled.

The 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" by the evening with great difficulty was able to capture Silash Balkhash, which was considered one of the strongholds of the Red Army on the southern flank. But at the same time, the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" was fighting almost behind the rear of the "Hitler Youth" division - there were huge territories that continued to be held by the Red Army. To cope with this task, the 403rd People's Artillery Corps, whose headquarters settled in Dega, had to be transferred to this sector of the front. Everything was done in order to form several German bridgeheads on the banks of Shio.

But at the same time, by no means all the assigned tasks were carried out immediately and promptly. The transfer of the 23rd Panzer Division from the western bank of the Sharviz Canal was very protracted. As early as 09:25 in the morning, Major General Kremer of the WaffenSS reported to the command of Army Group South that "the division is still on the march near Kaloz." "Probably," he continued, "the reason for this delay was enemy artillery fire, which was fired from the opposite bank of the canal. The battle group of the SS Panzer Corps, consisting of a reconnaissance battalion, sappers and heavy artillery, was able, according to plan, to advance between Kaloz and Nagylang to attack

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flank the enemy near Charkerestour. However, the enemy noticed the movements of the 23rd Panzer Division, and therefore was able to quickly take appropriate countermeasures, meeting it with fire from the eastern coast."

That is, it is clear that the task of the 23rd division - to form a bridgehead near Shar-Egresh, which was supposed to pull off part of the Soviet troops and facilitate the actions of the II SS Panzer Corps - was not carried out. The P SS Panzer Corps itself could only slightly move forward towards Sharkerestur. For most of the day, the German tankers in this sector of the front were busy not so much with the offensive as with repelling the Soviet counterattacks. The situation (for the Germans) was complicated by the fact that the divisional artillery was actually left without ammunition.

In the war diary that day it was written:

"The SS Panzer Corps, together with the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", with the direct support of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich", in a fierce struggle, involving huge losses, were able to take the vineyards to southwest of Sharkerestur. As a result, the formations managed to break through to the road linking Sharoshd and Sharkerestur. A fork in the road 2 kilometers southeast of Sharoshd was also taken under control, which greatly helped in repelling the ensuing enemy counterattack. The enemy counterattack, undertaken by the forces of six tanks, was aimed at the heights located 4 kilometers west of Yakabzallash. The own offensive, which was continued after repelling the counterattack, was met by a subdivision of enemy tanks on the defensive.

About how fierce the battles were in those days, says at least the following indicator: in only five days of March fighting in 1945, German sappers of the 6th Panzer Army (and not the entire army group!) Neutralized about 15 thousand min. Among the cleared mines there were also German mines. Most likely they fell into the hands of the Red Army from the warehouses of the new Bulgarian and Romanian allies.

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Soviet tank offensive

At the same time, parts of the III Panzer Corps (3rd Panzer and 356th Infantry Divisions) were able to slightly move forward on both sides of Sheregeyesh. At the same time, the 1st Panzer Division, which was part of the same corps, was able to capture the villages of Dinniesh and Gardon on the southern beret of Lake Velence. In principle, this division repeated the path that the Panzer Division "Totenkopf" had already once followed in January. On the sector of the front held by the SS Panzer Corps (north of Székesfehérvár), no major fighting took place that day.

A considerable delay and actual stoppage of the German offensive, caused by yet another swamping of the area, impassable roads, played into the hands of the Soviet command. The Red Army was given time to reinforce its defensive positions. First of all, this concerned the space between the Sharviz canal and Lake Velence.

The command of Army Group "South" understood that the situation was not in its favor, and therefore was looking for the most effective solutions. Thus, for example, preparations began for the offensive of the 23rd Panzer Division on Charbogard, which

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the swarm was supposed to help the II SS Panzer Corps, which was bogged down in lengthy battles on the "southern ledge". At the same time, the tactical success of the 1st Panzer Division should have made it possible to use the III Panzer Corps in full force. For this reason, the command of the army group Balka received an order to bring the 6th Panzer Division to the positions of the 3rd Panzer Corps as quickly as possible. It was to be kept in operational reserve, while the 1st and 3rd Panzer Divisions were to launch an offensive in a southeasterly direction towards Adon. Their main objective was Perkata and the subsequent breakthrough to the Danube.

At the same time, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army seriously thought about whether it was worth continuing the offensive in a southeasterly direction, to Pech, in order to meet there with

troops of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast. Given that the latter were never able to break through to any significant distance from the Drava River, it was very logical to attack in a northeasterly direction, where units of the 2nd Panzer Army could meet with divisions [of the cavalry corps. On the evening of that day, in a conversation with General Wöhler, Colonel-General Guderian confirmed that "first of all, we must seek associations with the cavalry corps." "The Führer himself is of the same opinion," Guderian summed up. But Guderian apparently had considerable doubts about the advisability of using the GU of the SS Panzer Corps by the army group Balka. When asked what kind of reserves you had [SS Panzer Corps], the commander of the army group was quick to assure that the Viking and Totenkopf divisions had a sufficient number of reserves. Guderian emphasized that an offensive by incomplete divisions could have been decided if there were not very many Soviet troops north of Szekesfehervar. But according to available information, the number of units of the Red Army in this sector of the front increased every day. However, General Wöhler hastened to dissuade Guderian. This hasty decision had disastrous consequences for Army Group South, especially if we take into account the fact that in the High Command of the Wehrmacht about

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the battles at the Sharviz Canal and at Lake Velence were to be regarded as secondary theaters of war. In order to decide on further actions, the High Command of the Ground Forces requested from the command of the 6th Panzer Army a full report on the losses incurred and the combat strength of the divisions. The data reported to Berlin are presented below in the form of several tables. We give them in full, as they may be of considerable interest to historians.

LOSSES IN PERSONNEL ON MARCH 8, 1945

A. | ponbao V. Wounded S. Missing A+B+C Units without a trace we sing Yojoni[s TV 1st Panzer Division 260 321 SS Leibstandarte 12th Panzer Division | 2 21 135 SS "Hitler Youth" Gtankovy corps of the SS

2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich"

9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen.

ha tank corps

UG E x | E x | SH a = we < 55 49) 49) 046) we x |

23rd Panzer Division

44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of Maintenance"

4th Cavalry Division 1 VISIA

vatankov army 8 | 137 8 [90 (tone 1 I | vao * O - officers, O + M - non-commissioned officers and soldiers, 5 - v

amount.

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STAFF AND BATTLE STRUCTURE OF CONNECTIONS ON MARCH 8, 1945

Established combat composition Connections composition. — | strength 1st SS Panzer Division 12461 4288 34.4% "Leibstandarte" 12th SS Panzer Division "Git- 11299 5173 45.8% Lerugend"

2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" 9259 3893 42.1%

9th SS Panzer Division "Hohen- 9739 5010 51.45% Staufen"

vision "Masters of TO"

STATE OF ARMORED VEHICLES

Ready for use Irrevocable

Under repair Connections

1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte"

12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth"

SS tank corps

2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich"

9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen"

P SS Panzer Corps

Ready to use Irrevocable In remote Connections lost

HER E WEIGHT Yuyu 0 0 EE

44th Imperial Gre

nader division

"Masters of TO"

3rd Cavalry 12

DIVISION

4th Cavalry 45th DIVISION

Gaunt] 6 | A

501st Tank Battalion (Royal Tigers)

560th Heavy Tank Destroyer Battalion

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* ӱӱ - tanks; \$#6S - assault guns; ERU! - armored carriers.

Since only 46% of the tanks in the 6th Panzer Army were ready for use, it was hardly possible to speak (even without taking into account the weather and the state of the terrain) about any classic tank offensive.

March 11, 1945 (Sunday). Day 6 of Operation Spring Awakening

"Temperature 4° C above zero. It was very windy at night. With the onset of the day, the weather has improved somewhat, although visibility remains low. The condition of the roads is poor, but strong winds are causing them to dry out."

On the Drava River, the divisions under the command of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast fought, as they say, "with varying success." They were completely blocked on several bridgeheads on the river bank, after which they were forced to go on the defensive. On this day, new Bulgarian formations were put into action against the Germans.

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niya. As a result, the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast considered "the continuation of the offensive from the bridgehead north of Donji Miholyac unpromising." In the evening report, which he sent at 20 o'clock to the command of Army Group South, he expressed his intention to "meet with the advanced units of the 6th Panzer Army in order to create a single bridgehead in the Valpovo area." Since the KhST (91st) Army Corps was unable to begin interaction (as previously planned) with the 2nd Tank Army, the entire operation plan collapsed. At the same time, the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast himself could not order anything to the command of the 2nd Panzer Army, and the command of Army Group South could not order anything to the KhSI (91st) Army Corps. For this reason, General Wöhler could only take this information into account, at best exerting indirect influence on the generals subordinate to the High Command of the Wehrmacht.

However, in the very command of the Army Group "South" they were already thinking about transferring the divisions located on the banks of the Drava to the subordination of the High Command of the Ground Forces. However, only Hitler himself could decide this issue. This was his exclusive competence.

At the same time, the offensive launched by the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" was not crowned with any noticeable success. The Soviet command sent fresh forces to meet the SS, including Bulgarian units. As a result, parts of the Reichsführer division were stopped on the outskirts of Nagykorpad. But at

Soviet counterattacks were as fierce as the defense

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At the same time, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army decided not to abandon the offensive in the former, "southern" direction. It assumed that the divisions were still able to break through to Nagykorpad, from where they were to turn east in the direction of the river.

But to implement this plan, the 2nd Panzer Army clearly did not have enough strength and ammunition: This was reported more than once to the command of Army Group South, but General Wöhler did not want to hear anything about these problems. He demanded as soon as possible to restore the previous direction of the offensive - to the east to Nagybayom. The only concession in this matter was time - it was given in order to "carry out a thorough preparation." The army was to regroup and launch a new offensive on March 13. "The command of the army must choose the weakest point in the positions of the enemy and throw there the maximum amount of forces available."

In response, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army declared that it was ready to start a new offensive only on March 15th. In response, the headquarters of Army Group "South" considered these terms unacceptable and again demanded to start the offensive on March 13, at least after dark: "Existing experience shows that in the current conditions this time of day is most favorable for breaking through the enemy defense line. . By tomorrow, the army command must provide preliminary considerations regarding the upcoming offensive.

Some tactical successes were achieved by the 6th Panzer Army.

Parts of the cavalry corps succeeded in pushing the Red Army away from the banks of the Shio Canal. At the same time, the right wing of the corps (25th Hungarian Infantry Division) advanced approximately 3 kilometers along the shore of Lake Balaton, northeast of Siofok. However, the 4th Cavalry

the division could not boast of such successes - it was never able to take Balaton-Sabadi. The 3rd Cavalry Division on the south bank of Shio had to face a powerful Soviet group, which was actively supported by artillery. As a result, the command of the corps ordered the division not to advance to the southern coast, but to clean up the territory

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on the northern bank and carrying out reconnaissance activities that would help to find crossings over the Shio. At the same time [the SS Panzer Corps with its three divisions was actively advancing along the northern bank of the canal in the direction between Ozora and Simontornja. Here, too, reconnaissance was carried out in search of fords. The 23rd Panzer Division, located near Shar Egres, was able to break through the Soviet defenses, but was unable to take advantage of its short-term success. The Soviet troops launched an instant counterattack, and therefore, as a result, the 23rd division was forced to regroup, going on the defensive.

On the western bank of the Sharviz Canal, a unit of the 1st Tank Corps was regrouping. After its implementation, the "battle group Krag" (2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich") was able to cross Sharviz northeast of Kaloz. However, here too the Germans failed. Under pressure from the Soviet troops, they were forced to retreat back to the western coast, planning to repeat the attack.

a little later.

The SS Panzer Corps was also bogged down in heavy fighting. The 2nd Reich Panzer Division was trying to push forward between Aba and Saroshd. But she managed to advance only to the village of Heinrich. During the battle for this village, the Germans destroyed six Soviet tanks and three anti-tank guns. But, having advanced, some parts of the corps were under the threat of Soviet attacks from the flanks. First of all, this concerned the Sharoshd-Sharkerestur section.

The 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" failed to take Aba. Moreover, the 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen, located in the neighborhood, was forced to constantly repel Soviet attacks, in the end, never moving from defense to offensive.

As a result, the strongholds of the Soviet defense along Sharviz (Aba, Sharoshd, Sharkerestur) were never taken by the Germans. All this greatly facilitated the solution of the tasks facing the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front. As a positive point, it can be noted that the N tank corps was finally "entangled" in its regroupings, and therefore it was hardly able to break through the Soviet defense line. The situation in Sh

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tank corps, which carried out a frontal offensive between Sheregeyesh and Garodon. The 1st Panzer Division captured the village of Chirib almost without any problems. The command of the Panzer Corps had high hopes for the 6th Panzer Division, which, with the support of the 3rd Panzer Division, was to capture Adon. But at the same time, it was impossible not to note that, having put all its reserves into play, the army group Balka significantly weakened its positions. But Balk, in the heat of the battle, did not want (or could not) notice that the Soviet command intended to take advantage of this circumstance, which concentrated units of the Red Army on both banks of the Danube.

Moreover, by decision of Marshal Tolbukhin, the defense was to be strengthened in all sectors of the front where the 6th Panzer Army was advancing. To this end, the 27th Army was regrouped in the vicinity of Lake Velence, and the 26th Army was regrouped in the southwestern sector. Based on the results of aerial reconnaissance carried out by the Germans, the headquarters of Army Group South received information that Soviet tanks were being transferred across the Danube in the Erchi region. Radio intercepts allowed the Germans to judge that Pliev's army was being transferred to Gran. All this indicated that the Soviet command was preparing a large-scale counteroffensive. However, in his evening conversation with General

Wöhler, Colonel-General Guderian expressed doubts about what the Red Army would undertake

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Soviet equipment follows the destroyed German units

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counteroffensive at the Gran. Just as he did not believe that the Soviet troops would undertake a major offensive operation in Hungary at all. This time he was wrong.

To continue the offensive the next day was ordered: |

- 2nd Panzer Army - continue to defend until the regrouping is completed, which should lead to a breakthrough of the Soviet line of defense by the forces of the 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division and the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer".

6 tank army:

a) the 1st Cavalry Corps - to settle the situation on the northern bank of the Shio canal, after which in the evening the reconnaissance battalions force the river and launch an offensive, creating several bridgeheads on the southern bank of the Shio on the night of March 12-13; .

B) The Gtank Corps - to take up positions on the already prepared bridgeheads in order to prepare to strike at the Soviet positions west of Ozora and slightly west of Shimontornya. After that, other parts of the corps should start forcing the Sharviz Canal near Shar-Egresh; this attack was supposed to end with the capture of Tsetse. The strategic goal of the corps was access to the Danube.

c) Panzer Corps - to continue the offensive between Sharkerestur and Saroshd. Gradually, the southward attack was to be redirected to Abu, thus providing flanking cover for the 9th SS Panzer Division Hohenstaufen. A separate SS battle group was to cross Sharviz near Kaloz in order to strike at Sharkerestur from the other side. |

e III Panzer Corps (Army Group Balka) - to continue to conduct defensive battles near Sheregeyesh. The 6th Panzer Division was to attack the village of Sabolch. The 1st Panzer Division, if possible, was to advance to the northeast.

To complete the picture, it should be noted that on this day the commander of the Army Group "South" was visited by the commander of the 3rd Hungarian "royal" army, Colonel-General Heslenyi. Apparently, it was about the use in

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SS regiment commanded by Ney, which consisted of Hungarian volunteers. During this conversation, General Wöhler noted: "I consider it necessary that SS-Sturmbannführer Ney join us as soon as possible, along with his part of the Waffen-SS."

An entry was made in the journal of the Supreme Command of the Ground Forces on that day, which makes it possible to judge the level of losses of the Red Army during the implementation of Operation Spring Awakening: "According to reports, in the period up to March 11, 1945, the enemy suffered the following losses: 1,077 killed, 140 captured, 34 tanks destroyed, 36 guns, 109 anti-tank guns, 55 captured anti-tank rifles, 15 grenade launchers, 8

downed aircraft and 20917 cleared mines. Apparently, the High Command specifically asked the command of the 6th Panzer Army for information regarding the level of Soviet losses.

March 12, 1945 (Monday). Day 7 of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is about 0 °C. Generally cloudy. Precipitation is observed in places. Road conditions are bad. Unfortified roads and open areas are impassable even for tracked vehicles." |

On the banks of the Drava, virtually nothing has changed. The Soviet and Bulgarian troops continued their attacks without stopping even for an hour. The commander-in-chief had to be content with the modest fact that his divisions were not driven out of the previously occupied bridgeheads. As a result, one should not expect any grandiose strategic changes on the western bank of the Danube, since none of the directing German "tongs", into which the troops of Marshal Tolbukhin were to be taken, actually moved forward. not a mile.

The 2nd Panzer Army actually curtailed its offensive. At night, its units were able to repel several Soviet attacks. In the afternoon, the Red Army also stopped all hostilities. This circumstance allowed the command of the 2nd Panzer Army to carry out a relatively successful regrouping of troops. Now the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsfue

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Soviet artillery takes up positions in the melt water

rer" was supposed to attack the Soviet positions near the town of Martsali, and the 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division - near the village of Ketey. In order to carry out this offensive more effectively, both divisions were subordinated to the command of the XXII Mountain Rifle Corps. The general offensive of the 2nd Panzer Army to the east was to begin on March 14th. In a few days, this not the strongest army had to travel 70-80 kilometers to reach the Shio Canal!

The 6th Panzer Army began to establish bridgeheads west of Mesø Komarom (1st Cavalry Corps) and immediately west of Shimontornya (1st SS Panzer Corps). Mostly on this day, the mentioned formations had to repel Soviet counterattacks. At the same time, the 23rd Panzer Division, which continued to advance on Shar Egres, did not achieve any success. At the same time, the offensive of the 25th Hungarian infantry division began to fade. She more and more often had to go on the defensive, repelling the attacks of the Red Army units from all sides.

Unexpectedly at night, the 4th Cavalry Division managed to recapture a decent piece of territory from the Red Army, on which a bridgehead two kilometers deep and three kilometers wide was created. These positions were immediately reinforced

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units of the 3rd Cavalry Division, which itself was located at that moment to the north-west of Mezo Komarom. At that time, divisions could repel Soviet attacks only by joining forces. During one of the battles, German cavalry even managed to knock out one Soviet tank. The successes of [the tank corps were greater than those of other formations of the 6th tank army. At night, the 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" several times unsuccessfully tried to force a canal near the village of Kula (north of Ozory). Only the 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte" was able to cope with this task, which was reinforced by a grenadier regiment from the SS division "Hitler Youth". At 0430 hours they were able to create a bridgehead west of Shimontornya and gain a foothold on it. This bridgehead had a depth of one and a half and a width of two kilometers. At the same time, units of the Leibstandarte division, after fierce fighting, were able to

infiltrate the outskirts of Simontornya. The 23rd Panzer Division spent most of the day unsuccessfully trying to storm the well-fortified Shar-Egres. But these attacks were not only unsuccessful, but also ended in a tactical defeat for the division. During another counterattack, the Soviet troops were able to push back the 23rd division several kilometers from the city. For a time, units of the Red Army even liberated the village of Yanoshkhaza. Some success was also achieved that day by the SS Panzer Corps. The 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order", covered by units of the 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich", penetrated into Aba from two sides (from the north and east). By evening, after fierce fighting, the town fell: At the same time, the Krag battle group managed to force the Sharviz Canal and begin to develop the offensive. During bloody battles, this SS strike group reached the village of Sentimre, located southwest of Sharkerestur. Now the Germans stormed this settlement from three sides: from the north, east and southwest. But the Red Army men, entrenched in Sharkerestur, continued to fight, courageously holding the line. The situation on this sector of the front was very difficult. On the one hand, the Germans were desperately trying to take Charkerestur, and on the other, they were forced to continuously repulse

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reap the Soviet counterattacks taken from the flanks. The most bloody battles took place in the village of Heinrich, on the streets of which they fought until the very morning of the next day.

Meanwhile, the 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen" failed to significantly improve its position near Charoshl. The division gradually curtailed its offensive and went on the defensive. Despite the fact that in the course of fierce battles associated with enormous losses, the C SS Panzer Corps managed to take Abu, this did not change the situation as a whole. The offensive to the south did not develop more rapidly. Moreover, the resistance of the Soviet troops became stronger every day. There was an increase in the number of artillery units in the Red Army. The Germans, on the contrary, became weaker and weaker every day. The 3rd Panzer Corps, as part of its three panzer divisions, was able to advance only 2 kilometers in the direction of the village of Sabolch. Some success was achieved by the 1st Panzer Division, which captured several heights south of Gardoni. During this battle, the 509th heavy tank battalion managed to destroy 20 Soviet self-propelled artillery mounts. It seemed that this was an amazing result, but even such losses on the Soviet side did not allow the Germans to break through the line of defense of the Red Army. By and large, the Shtank Corps was never able to turn the tide in its sector of the front. Relative calm reigned in the location of the 3rd Hungarian Army and [At the SS Panzer Corps. -

Since the Battle of Balaton was approaching its climax, it makes sense to show several epicenters of the battle, in which the units of the 6th Panzer Army mainly took part:

- a) Shio Canal, 5 kilometers east of Adanda (25th Hungarian Infantry Division, 4th Cavalry Division);
- 6) terrain 5 kilometers southeast of Adand (3rd and 4th cavalry divisions);
- (c) 2 kilometers east of Szymontornja (12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth" and 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte");
- 4) 2.5 kilometers southeast of Shimontornya (1st SS Panzer Division Leibstandarte and 23rd Panzer Division);

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- f) 2, > kilometers northeast of Charkerestur (44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Geutonic Order" and 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich");

0 1.5 kilometers southwest of Jakabsallash (2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" and 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen").

Very soon the successes of the right wing of the 6th Panzer Army began to show. Having stabilized the front along the Shio Canal, the Germans managed not only to gain a foothold on its banks, but also successfully repel all Soviet counterattacks. This success impressed General Wöhler so much that he personally went to the command post of the 6th Panzer Army to discuss the plan of further actions with Sepp Dietrich.

To continue the offensive the next day, it was ordered:

- 2nd Panzer Army - to continue the regrouping, which was a prerequisite for an offensive in an easterly direction. At the same time, reconnaissance was to be carried out, which was designed to find out the strength of the Red Army forces located along the southern shore of Lake Balaton.

- 6th Panzer Army:

- a) 1st Cavalry Corps - to complete the settlement of the situation on the northern bank of the Shio Canal, and then expand the bridgehead near Meze Komarom in order to subsequently strike in a southwestern direction. At the same time, units of the cavalry corps were supposed to ensure "docking" with the 2nd Panzer Army.

- 6) [the SS tank corps was supposed to strike south

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SS Standartenführer Karl Creutz

nom or southeast direction, and then begin preparations for the crossing of Sharviz near Tsetse.

- c) Panzer Corps was to capture Sharkerestur and take the high ground south of Khantosh.

- army group Balka:

- a) Sh Panzer Corps - to block the roads linking Kish-Velence and the village of Sabolch, and then capture Sabolch. Upon completion of these tasks, the corps was to launch an offensive in an easterly direction in order to cover the flank of the P SS Panzer Corps.

- B) [At the SS Panzer Corps and the 3rd Hungarian Army — to prepare for an offensive north of Szekesfehervar (this plan is not specified).

March 13, 1945 (Tuesday). Day 8 of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is up to 6 °C above zero. Cloudy in places. Somewhere there is clear weather. Good visibility. The condition of the roads is bad, but they are starting to dry up."

ÿÿÿÿÿÿ (91st) army corps of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast was involved in protracted defensive battles. The situation in this sector of the front was so difficult (for the Germans) that the possibility of the speedy liquidation of the German bridgehead near Donji Miholyac was not ruled out - so heavy were the losses there. However, the concentration of Soviet and Bulgarian troops near this bridgehead allowed the command of the 2nd Panzer Army to freely regroup troops near Martsali and Ketey. Thus, a new epicenter of the battle arose, 10-20 kilometers wide, at the southwestern end of Lake Balaton. On the evening of that day, the 16th SS Reichsführer Division and the 1st People's Mountain Division were ready to launch an offensive to link up with the 1st Cavalry Corps. But unexpectedly

but for the command of the 2nd Panzer Army, Soviet troops attacked German positions northwest of Nagybayom. The German operation was in jeopardy. One could try to parachute strike groups of both divisions from Lake Balaton. But even this plan had to be abandoned, since the southern shores of the lake were covered with thin ice,

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suitable for moving along it, but at the same time very much hindering the movement of boats. Due to such difficulties, there was a risk that the entire German landing force would be destroyed with the Soviet troops, before they even landed on the shore.

All plans were thwarted that day in the sector of the front between Lake Balaton and Lake Velence. It was here that the maximum concentration of Soviet troops was observed. The situation here was best characterized by the message that the command of the 6th Panzer Army sent in clear text to the headquarters of Army Group South:

"The day passed under the sign of enemy counterattacks in the places of our supposed offensives. The 1st Cavalry Corps during its attack was driven back to its original positions east of Adand. It is still possible to prevent further advance of the enemy, but we should expect his further attacks. The 1st SS Panzer Corps on the bridgehead near Simontornja lost Hill 220, which, however, was returned during the ensuing counterattack. In this area, it is worth waiting for new enemy offensives. The construction of a bridge 30 meters long and 4.5 meters wide is constantly disrupted due to powerful enemy artillery fire. Despite the support of the Luftwaffe, the attacks on Shar Egres were not successful. We need to reassess the situation. Enemy counterattacks indicate the appearance of fresh forces in the enemy, which cannot be ignored. The enemy is especially active in attacking the positions of the II SS Panzer Corps. With an almost fourfold advantage in tanks, the 18th Panzer Corps attacked immediately in seven places. Almost all of these attacks were repelled. The most powerful attacks come from Sharoshd. It is assumed that fresh enemy forces are taking up positions between the Danube and the Sharviz Canal, as well as on the bridgeheads at Dunafeldvar and Dunapentele. Plans for March 14 remain

unchanged."

As follows from the above document, [the cavalry corps not only failed to expand its bridgehead, but, quite the opposite: only by mobilizing all the reserves, the cavalymen could hardly keep from

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By the end of Operation Spring Awakening, Soviet artillery had multiple superiority.

separate plots on the south coast of Shio. The Soviet troops actually took Lajoshkomarom without a fight and came close to Mezo-Komarom. But at that moment, the anger of the command of Army Group South fell primarily on the 25th Hungarian Infantry Division. In the morning, the command of this division informed the headquarters of the army group that, together with the "instigators" (slang literal translation of the name of the light Hungarian assault guns "Hetzer"), the infantrymen entered Siofok. The audit showed that there was not even a grain of truth in this information. The division did not even start the offensive. As a result, General Wöhler transferred through command | cavalry corps, which expects Colonel Calco, commander of the 25th Infantry Division, to take this settlement by the evening of this day.

The 1st SS Panzer Corps was forced to fight defensive battles near Simontornya. Despite air support, the Germans were unable to cross Sharviz in order to gain a foothold in the bridgehead at Tsetse. At the same time, units of the 23rd Panzer Division were fighting almost

for each house in Shar Egres. The command of the corps was annoyed that they could not establish a crossing over Shio, and therefore there was nothing left to do but try

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hold the bridgehead at Ozora and Shimontornya. But even here the Germans could hardly count on tactical success - the fire of Soviet artillery intensified every hour.

The Panzer Corps, which had penetrated the Soviet lines a few days earlier, was reaping the fruits of its tactical success. Parts of the Red Army constantly attacked him from the flanks. The 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order" not only did not take (as planned) Charkov, but with difficulty held the previously occupied territories. The 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" found itself in the midst of a fierce battle, when it had to repel Soviet attacks from several sides simultaneously. The most inferno was going on near the village of Heinrich. On that day, four Soviet tanks were knocked out (including two from Faust cartridges). Then from the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army they reported:

"In general, our advanced units today have not been able to achieve success in any sector of the front. The day was marked by numerous enemy counterattacks, which were also unsuccessful. The enemy has become so strong in the sector between Sharviz and the Danube that our subsequent

One of the few Soviet aircraft shot down by German anti-aircraft artillery over Western Hungary

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offensive here is hardly possible. Over the past seven days of the offensive, the units have suffered huge losses and are completely exhausted by week-long battles.

Such a wording meant only one thing - the command of the 6th Panzer Army did not see any further prospects for Operation Spring Awakening.

The 3rd Panzer Corps, after regrouping, concentrated its strike forces northwest of Sabolch. The 1st Panzer Division was supposed to repel Soviet counterattacks, which were supported by the fire of dozens of heavy guns. The German offensive stalled on this sector of the front as well. The 3rd Tank Corps was opposed by the 163rd Soviet Rifle Division, which was part of the 27th Army.

It was on this day that the next results were summed up regarding the losses and combat effectiveness of the German formations.

LOSSES IN PERSONNEL IN THE PERIOD FROM 6 TO MARCH 13, 1945

A. Killed B. Wounded C. Lost | A+B+ Connections missing from

ojomge 'o [sem [o[o]m] z ti SS division

205[211[| 16 | 1059 |1075 148 | 149 | 1435 "Leibstandarte" 12th Panzer 143 637 | 656th SS Division "Hitler Youth" Gtankovy Kor- |11| 348 | 359 |1B35| 1696 |1731| 1 | 301 | 302 | 2392 SS 2nd Panzer Division 123 [132 | 20 | 659 |679 13 194 | 1005 SS Reich Vision 9th Panzer Division 142 | 153 | 25 | 51 | 536 105 [105 | 794 vision of the SS "Hohenstaufen" P tank cor- | 20) 265 | 285 |1B45 | 1170 |1215| 3 | 296 | 299 | 1799 SS 23rd Panzer 5| 58 | 63 245 | 254 3 3 320 DIVISION

319

1st tank

Connections missing C

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3rd cavalry - 9. 433 13 13 533 division

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Tkavaleriyskiy 148 | 157 | 34 733 21 | 21 | 911 Corps 6th tank ar- |49| 914 | 963 | 154 | 4174|43284| 624 |
628 | 5919 mission 2nd tank army 2810 |2897 3562 Army group | 12| 462 | 474 | 64 | 2029 | 2093 310 | 3101
2877 Beam

Army Group 95| 1850 |1945| 305 | 9013 |9318| 5 | 1090 |1095| 12358 "South" (only cha

sti, accepting- !

our participation in

operations)

Parts of Glavnoko- 506 1798 156 | 2460

SE

German casualties 2451 11116 1251| 14818 per week on

steps

* O - officers, O + M - non-commissioned officers and soldiers, 5 - in total. STAFF AND BATTLE
COMPOSITION OF THE FORMATIONS ON MARCH 13, 1945

1st SS Panzer Division 12075 3492 w Leibstandarte 12th SS Panzer Division 12295 4594. 37% Hitler
Youth

| combat composition

Established Connections" composition number

1 SS Panzer Corps 24370 8086 33% 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich" 9143 3344

9th SS Panzer Division "Hohen-8029 4320 54% Staufen"

vision "Masters of TO"

STATE OF ARMORED VEHICLES AS OF MARCH 13, 1945

In short- Ready for In capital- | Irrevocable - urgent re

application of nom repair | monte losses

Connections

1st Panzer Division

HER YO

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Zia SS "Leibstan-.

dart"

12th Panzer Division | 54 | 67 |194 | 20 | 27 | 22 22 1551512

Zia SS "Hitler

Gend"

1 tank corps 140 392| 46 | 371 50| 51 | 22| 731171 3

SS

2nd tank division | 51 | 56 (223 | 40 | 39 4 | 5

Zia SS "Reich"

9th Panzer Division | 56 | 57 |224 | 33 | 30 | 36 371 4

Zia SS Hohenstau

hair dryer

P tank corps | 1071113 |447| 73 126 37 5

SS

23rd Panzer Division | 53 | 29 25 | 13 | 13 3

Zia

321

In short- Ready for In capital- | Irrevocable - urgent re

application of nom repair | connection losses

44th Imperial Grenadier DIVISION "Masters of TO"

3rd Cavalry 22 13

DIVISION

4th Cavalry | 4 121.2 |15 { 4

DIVISION

Gcavalry 4 |38 | 20| 2 | 28 |10

frame

6th Panzer 30412791957 | 137 205 | 76 | 35 |123] 31 armies

* P7 - tanks; \$516 - assault guns; 5R\M - armored personnel carriers.

Despite the complexity of the situation, the next day the orders given to the formations remained unchanged:

1) At the positions of the 2nd Panzer Army, the 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer" and the 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division were to launch an offensive in an easterly direction. Their first goal was to be the capture of Shomodvar and Yoreglak.

2) The 6th Panzer Army was to try again to attack the Soviet positions. As priority tasks, an offensive from the southwest and northeast to Sharkerestur and the liquidation of the Soviet bridgehead Shar-Egresh were considered.

3) The Sh Panzer Corps (Army Group Balka) was to take Hill 145 and cut the roads connecting Sheregeyesh, Perkata and Solgaedhaza.

Meanwhile, the command of the 3rd Ukrainian Front sent fresh strike forces (9th Guards Army and 6th Tank Guards Army) to the Soviet defensive lines.

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March 14, 1945 (Wednesday). Day 9 of Operation Spring Awakening

"The temperature is up to 13 °C above zero. Generally warm and sunny. The roads are drying up, it is possible to move around the territory on caterpillar vehicles."

The most notable event of that day was the American air raid on Komarom. This time it was no longer a symbolic act. During the bombing, almost 70% of the city's oil refineries were destroyed. It could be assumed that this raid was directly related to the impending Soviet offensive. It was so powerful that neither the use of anti-aircraft artillery nor the sorties of Luftwaffe fighters could save the factories so precious to Hitler. Germany finally lost its air supremacy.

In the current situation, it is unlikely that anything could change the situation in Western Hungary. The attack on Pech completely failed. There was no question of "settlement of the situation on the western bank of the Danube".

According to the developed plan, at 9 o'clock in the morning the SS division "Reichsführer" and the 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division, which were part of the 2nd Panzer Army, began their offensive in an easterly direction. They had to do the unbelievable - to break through the well-organized line of the Soviet defense, which, in addition to traditional barriers, was equipped with extensive minefields. During the whole day, these two German divisions managed to invade the Soviet positions for three kilometers - it was a good tactical success, but by no means an expected strategic breakthrough. Nevertheless, the commander of the 2nd Panzer Army, General de Angelis, continued to hope that "the offensive will succeed tomorrow, when the first line of the Soviet defense is broken."

On this day, units of the 6th Panzer Army managed to repel several Soviet attacks on German positions along the Shio Canal. The 1st Cavalry Corps could only defend itself. The 25th Hungarian Infantry Division not only did not occupy a single settlement, but could not even properly hold the defense. By and large, now the Hungarians were not helpers to the Germans, but rather a burden. As a result, the 3rd and 4th cavalry

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Soviet self-propelled artillery mounts of the IX Guards Mechanized Corps enter the Hungarian city. Spring 1945

On March 14 alone, the divisions managed to repulse eight Soviet attacks, which were mainly launched from the bridgehead east of Adand. By the way, during one of these attacks, 15 Soviet tanks were used.

The 1st SS Panzer Corps was able to slightly expand its foothold near Simontornya. In fact, it was the only German unit that continued to attack. During one of the attacks, the Germans managed to push back the Red Army behind Shar-Egres, but this was followed by a surprise attack of the 11th Panzer Corps on Sharkerestur, and even more fierce Soviet counterattacks. In addition, the Germans were almost completely suppressed by the fire of Soviet artillery and mortars. It was no longer an artillery duel, but an exclusively Soviet barrage of fire. Having knocked out the German pilots from the airspace over Western Hungary, the Soviet attack aircraft constantly "ironed" the positions of the SS tank corps.

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By this time, the Soviet command had found weak points in the German defense. So, for example, a blow to the positions [of a tank corps] was inflicted near the village of Belshe Sari (between Ozora and Mezo Komar). This village was held by the weakest units of the SS division "Hitler Youth". The Soviet troops even managed in some places to break through to the northern (German) coast of Shio. However, command | the tank corps was not going to be idle. The SS division "Leibstandarte", reinforced by several battalions from the division "Hitler Youth", was able to expand its bridgehead at Simontornya, moving forward two kilometers to height 115. At the same time, the tankers of the "Leibstandarte" had to not only attack, but also repel Soviet counterattacks. However, Soviet artillery did its job. One of the rows of shells destroyed the crossing over Shio, and as a result, the Germans again had to build bridges across the canal. We can say that the 23rd Panzer Division was also lucky. After three days of exhausting and bloody battles, the German tankers managed to push back the Red Army units from Shar-Egresh. The Soviet troops were forced to retreat to the other side of the Shio.

Meanwhile, the II SS Panzer Corps continued to fight unsuccessfully for Charkerestour. The Soviet command sent more and more units here. The infantry units were constantly undertaking counterattacks, supported by tank units of 10-20 vehicles. Huge losses were suffered by both fighting sides. But success was on the side of the Red Army - the Germans were slowly forced out of the bridgehead near Kaloz.

The Sh Panzer Corps could not develop the offensive and. went on the defensive. It became more and more obvious that the operation "Spring Awakening" had failed and the offensive could no longer be continued with the forces at the disposal of the Germans. They wanted to get everything overnight, but they did not achieve anything.

The clearer it became that the 6th Panzer Army would begin to retreat from day to day, the more often the eyes of the command of Army Group South turned to the defensive lines of the army group Balka, which did not take such an active part in Operation Spring Awakening. . Exactly

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On that day, reports began to come from the headquarters of the IV SS Panzer Corps and the 3rd Hungarian Army that large Soviet formations were seen moving towards the front. It was reported about a thousand cars with Red Army soldiers who rushed to the front line. The headquarters of Army Group South suggested that the site of the new Soviet breakthrough was to be the "Viennese direction", namely Tatabanya and More. These conclusions were confirmed by information provided by German air intelligence. Moreover, the pilots reported an even more grandiose number of cars and vehicles. Now no one had any doubts that a major Soviet offensive was to begin any day now. In this situation, the Soviet offensive could not only bring down, but sweep away the uncovered left wing of the Balka army group. However, Balk, in his characteristic manner, preferred either to build castles in the air, or to intrigue, but by no means prepare.

to the defense. He believed that the offensive would be carried out only by the forces of two Soviet corps, and therefore the existing forces would be quite sufficient to repel their onslaught. According to his "assessments", the 6th Guards Tank Army "should" have operated on the other side of the Danube. When it became clear that such imprudent judgments had no grounds, all conceivable and unimaginable reserves began to be mobilized in the army group in a fire mode. As a result, the supply of the 6th Panzer Army was threatened. But Bulk was of little interest. He, as before, radiated "unreasonable optimism." He naively believed that the anti-tank and anti-aircraft artillery at his disposal could stop the Soviet tanks. Meanwhile, the command of the 6th Panzer Army saw what a trap the entire Army Group South could fall into. Sepp Dietrich understood that Marshal Tolbukhin would hardly have refused to encircle the Four Tank Corps. In this situation, at least eight German tank divisions could have ended up in the Hungarian pocket. If such a scenario had begun to develop, then nothing would have blocked the Red Army's path to Vienna. In a way, this was like a situation

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1805, when, in the battle of Ulm, Napoleon's troops surrounded the Austrian army, forcing it to capitulate.

But realizing the seriousness of the situation in this situation was not enough. The command of Army Group South was faced with a serious choice: to withdraw the tank units and thereby save them, or to continue the senseless offensive, as Hitler and the generals of the High Command wanted.

A typical "telephone-SS panzergrenadier battle" began. At 21:25, they were retreating from Balaton, Lieutenant-General Grolman contacted Sepp Dietrich, offering to decide how they should proceed. Grolman himself no longer doubted the failure of Operation Spring Awakening. Otherwise, he would not have uttered a very risky phrase: "Continuing the offensive in view of the measures taken by the enemy is a dangerous and risky undertaking." In the conversation, many options were put forward for regrouping, but all of them had one significant drawback - it took three or even four days.

Dietrich himself said that he sees only one single solution to the current situation. It was necessary to remove the 1st Panzer Corps from the banks of the Shio Canal and transfer it to the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal. Having gathered together a tank fist, consisting of three tank corps (GSS, P SSi Pý), it was necessary to strike in the direction of the Danube. Having broken through the Soviet defenses on a small section of the front, after reaching the river, it was necessary to turn north and walk along the unprotected rear of the Red Army, thereby surrounding the advancing Soviet units. However, Dietrich immediately made a reservation, putting an end to this plan: "The prerequisite for this operation was to be

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The soil is good and passable. In its current state, the regrouping would have dragged on until the twentieth of March." At the same time, Dietrich did not deny that it was necessary to urgently withdraw [the SS Panzer Corps and the 23rd Panzer Division, until they got into the "bag". It was assumed that they were to be concentrated southwest of Szekesfeharvar. This idea was conveyed by telephone to the General Staff of the Ground Forces around midnight. In the conversation, it was openly stated that it was hardly necessary to have illusions about the continuation of Operation Spring Awakening. At the same time, it was emphasized that "the combined power of the 1st SS Panzer Corps, II SS Panzer Corps and II Panzer Corps represented a monstrous force." The offensive of this tank armada could begin on March 20th. But in conducting this conversation, a certain tactic was needed, since almost everyone knew Hitler's short-sightedness when it came to choosing between the necessary and feasible. Already at night, General Wöhler contacted Guderian. Army Group Commander

The South spoke of "the need for clearer global targets as the only way to still make things right." After listening to the proposals for regrouping, Guderian assured that he would report this to the Führer. And then he asked if it was possible to carry it out in 48 hours? General Wöhler did not swear that it was possible to meet such deadlines, but promised that the command of the 6th Panzer Army would do everything possible for this. The painful hours passed. And once again, Hitler gave Tolbukhin an invaluable gift. He refused to authorize the regrouping of the panzer divisions. In order to somehow rectify the situation, the strategic initiative in the command of the 6th Panzer Army of Western Hungary began to prepare details

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The Germans could not intercept

new rationale for the proposed plan. But once again there was a refusal.

On the morning of March 15, 1945, Sepp Dietrich sent a "lightning" telegram to the divisions of the 6th Panzer Army, in which he assessed the current situation. It said that the weather and landscape features allowed the Red Army to buy time to create new powerful defensive lines, that a Soviet offensive should have been expected, that the offensive should be continued, that the only way out was an attack on Soviet positions, which should end in the destruction of units Red Army. To do this, it was necessary to covertly regroup for four nights. Sepp Dietrich would later fall into disgrace for disobeying Hitler's orders. However, even the measures taken by this SS general could hardly improve anything in the battle for Western Hungary. The battle near the shores of Lake Balaton was entering a decisive phase.

March 15, 1945 (Thursday). Day 10 of Operation Spring Awakening. Climax of the battle

"The temperature is up to 9 °C above zero. It is foggy, visibility is poor. It's raining in places."

The assumption of General Balk that the Soviet units would attack the German positions on the move was not confirmed. The Soviet command was not so imprudent as to immediately attack on a wide front. Nevertheless, March 15, 1945 is considered the climax of Operation Spring Awakening, when the situation on the western bank of the Danube finally changed in favor of the Red Army. In fact, this was the date when the German offensive ended.

Despite all attempts to convince Hitler that it was necessary to regroup in order to form a new "tank fist", the Führer continued to insist that the battle should continue in the same positions. As a result, as in many similar cases, his violent reaction was "provoked", when Hitler himself did not want to plead guilty for his own decisions, but was engaged in the search for the guilty ones. The divisions of the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast were finally driven back to their previous positions. Bulgarian

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hundreds. And! =. VboKrgis® a E. Base 2 north of Donja Mi-HOLJAC.

Both advancing divisions from the 2nd Panzer Army in fierce battles suffered such

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| _ KAVREZTAREEM UOVAT\$- VEVEIT20STEEM./ AEZ She still managed to break through the Soviet defenses. 16th ao. panzergresnader di- PEE IN EEEEE ar EE VISION "Reichsführer" EEE took the settlement of MÿNERR ZENSZEVIE UN guards: a mountain rifle division A page from the combat log of the group approached Totsen of the armies "South" tpalu. But it was progress on its last legs. The destruction of the entire defensive line of the Red Army near the southern shores of Lake Balaton could not be achieved.

elk, and it was not possible.

Parts of the 6th Panzer Army somewhat expanded their foothold along the banks of the Shio Canal. The attempted attack in the Meso Komaroma region actually put an end to the attempts of the Red Army that day to gain a foothold on the northern bank of the Shio and create at least one offensive bridgehead there. All day fighting continued at Sharkerestour, but neither side was able to gain the upper hand. As on the previous day, the Soviet troops continued to offer fierce resistance to the Germans, shelling their positions with heavy artillery. As before, the density and activity of Soviet artillery fire was constantly increasing. Some success was achieved by the "battle group Krag" from the SS division "Reich" - it nevertheless managed to force Sharviz and gain a foothold near Kaloz. At the same time, the sapper battalion of the 44th Imperial Grenadier Division

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zii "Masters of the Teutonic Order" was able to build two bridges over the Sharviz, under which the fire of Soviet artillery did not stop for an hour, along which German tank troops could cross to the other side.

Parts of the III Panzer Corps during the day unsuccessfully tried to storm the heights located to the northeast of Sheregeyesh. But each attack ended in failure. On the heights, the Soviet command concentrated a significant amount of anti-tank artillery, and an order was given to dig several tanks into the ground up to the tower. The result of these battles was one wrecked Soviet tank and the loss of five of their own by the Germans.

Meanwhile, the reports of German army intelligence, radio intelligence and air intelligence converged on one thing - huge forces of the Red Army were heading towards the front line. As a result of attempts to create a picture of these movements, some kind of enchanting picture arose on the map at the headquarters of Army Group South. All the neighborhoods west of Budapest were dotted with red arrows, next to which were explanatory signs: "900 cars", "250 trucks", "200 vehicles", "there was a clang of caterpillars", etc. The so-called "red points", which marked the places of the most active Soviet bombardments, are worthy of special mention. It was assumed that it was here that the Soviet breakthrough would be carried out: Tatabanya - Komarom - Mor - Raab - Veszprem - Zirts. Army Group South's war diary that day stated:

"Despite expectations, the enemy did not launch an offensive today on the sector of the front between Szekesfehervar and the Vertes Mountains. From the dense fog, air reconnaissance was able to make out only small movements. But at the same time, allegedly active actions are being taken south of Zamoy. Near the attack aircraft corps, previously located in the Ipolshaga area, is directed south of Budapest, where it covers the 2nd Guards Mechanized Corps. It can be said with confidence that the forces of this corps will be put into action in the near future. There is no information regarding the disposition of the 6th Guards Tank Army and Pliev's Army.

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It is significant that it was only at this critical moment that mentions of the 6th Panzer Army appeared in the combat log of the Wehrmacht High Command. But in this case it

is done only in connection with the "Russian threat".

Under these conditions, a "struggle for reserves" began in Army Group South itself. During the offensive, two divisions from the 2nd Panzer Army literally lost almost a third of their combat strength in just a day. As a result, they turned to the Commander-in-Chief in the southeast with a request to help with reserves. After the 92nd Motorized Grenadier Brigade was transferred to the Balka Army Group, the 2nd Tank Army was left without any reserves. But the request was also left unanswered.

Instead of reserves, the command of the 2nd Panzer Army received instructions from the headquarters of Army Group South to "continue active operations in the forest zone, which could tie down the enemy's actions." But apparently, it was a simple reply. The position of the 2nd Panzer Army no longer worried anyone. Even the 6th police regiment was taken away from her.

It was at this moment that forces from Berlin began to intervene. To all reproaches, Lieutenant General Grolman replied that "the plan for a massive breakthrough in the southeast direction could lead to success." To avoid about

The Balaton defensive operation for the Red Army turned into the Vienna offensive

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accusations of refusing to carry out Hitler's order, he added: "It was only about a clearer formulation of the main tasks, but by no means about a fundamental change in the existing plan." But at the same time, he could not refrain from some criticism of the plan of operation, which did not go in accordance with his proposals and even not in accordance with the proposals made by the command of the 6th Panzer Army: "At the headquarters of Army Group South" From the very beginning, it was emphasized that the eastern bank of the Sharviz Canal was to become the epicenter of the battle, which made it possible to use the terrain favorable for tanks, and then cut off the enemy from his supply bases.

Actually, the whole day was spent in negotiations. Guderian contacted Wöhler, trying to understand whether "the correct point of view of the command of Army Group South was presented last night to the Fuhrer." Such caution was due to the fact that he was afraid that the command of the 6th Panzer Army would report the situation to Hitler before he did it himself. At the end of the war, it was a very common practice when the liaison officer of Hitler's Headquarters contacted the commander of an army directly and received from him all the necessary information, bypassing the High Command and the command of the army group. Several hours passed before the command of the 6th Panzer Army was able to calm Grolman and Guderian. Hours dragged on in anticipation of the next decision of the Fuhrer. At 2035 hours, unable to stand the tense wait, the headquarters of Army Group South contacted the Operations Department of the High Command, but they said that nothing was known so far. Only at 9:30 p.m. Guderian called General Wöhler and said that "the Fuhrer approved the proposed regrouping option." It was proposed to hurry with this event, since it was supposed to be completed in three days. And on his own behalf, Guderian added: "In your situation, it would be logical to finish it in 48 hours." This "temporary blackmail" was not new. Even the same Army Group "South" more than once had to wait days and nights for the Fuhrer's decision, in order to urgently make up for wasted hours. Theoretically, everything could be done in the shortest possible time if:

- it was possible to do this until now, when the earth had not dried out;

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- fuel would be plentiful;

- there would be no constant Soviet artillery fire, and Soviet aviation would not dominate the air over Western Hungary;
- units of the Red Army would not be preparing for a grandiose offensive.

Already at night, the news of the Fuhrer's decision to allow the regrouping began to spread throughout the divisions. Actually, the night of March 15-16, 1945 passed without any major hostilities. But this lull was deceptive. On the morning of March 16, units of the Red Army launched a major offensive, which went down in history under the name of the "Vienna Offensive Operation".

The command of the 6th Panzer Army did not need to carry out such a long-awaited regrouping. In just a couple of weeks, German units were driven out of Hungary. The 6th Panzer Army ended its combat path near Vienna, and the 2nd Panzer Army in Styria. Hitler could not hide his rage, bringing down all his anger for the defeat on the division of the Waffen-SS so recently beloved by him. Although it is unlikely that they could hold back the Soviet offensive, which in German sources remained under the name "red flood".

Chapter 4 HITLER'S REACTION

To complete the plot with the battles at Lake Balaton and the battle for Western Hungary would be more logical to tell about Hitler's order, which ordered a number of SS divisions to remove the sleeve patches with the name of these divisions. This story found wide coverage in post-war literature. At the same time, in various books, he was supplemented with information that often gave his interpretation a completely fantastic character.

The most complete account of the events of that day can be found in Georg Mayer's book "The Drama between Budapest and Vienna". The fact is that Georg Mayer was a staff officer

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SS division "Reichsführer" retreats to Styria

Roma of the 6th Panzer Army, who was on duty at the very moment when the telegram arrived with this order. In the summer of 1950, Mayer was contacted by Paul Hausser, who at that moment was working on the book SS Troops in Battle. In response to the letter, Mayer replied to the former SS general that "the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army accepted a similar order from the Fuhrer, but it was never passed on to Sepp Dietrich." As a result, the following line appeared in the book of Paul Hausser: "In fairness, it must be said that Adolf Hitler was misled, and therefore gave the order to remove the armbands. However, this order was never transmitted. In the second edition of Hausser's book, this story was presented in the following interpretation:

"Hitler demanded to fight to the last on all fronts. However, the situation was hopeless - it was not possible to hold the front. The connections went further and further away. The Hungarian section of the Eastern Front, which was held by the 6th Panzer Army, also risked collapse. In response, Hitler ordered the divisions that were part of this army to remove their armbands. However, this order was never transmitted.

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Now the interpretation has changed somewhat. According to Mayer's comments, this order was not carried out, since Sepp Dietrich himself forbade it to be transferred in parts. But in this situation, it turns out that Sepp Dietrich nevertheless received this order, which did not follow from the initial letter of Georg Mayer. Such discrepancies seriously undermine the reliability of Mayer's memoirs, but nevertheless they remain the only more or less reliable source on this issue. Looking ahead, we can assume that the refusal to carry out this order was caused not by Dietrich's "indignantly frondier position", but by the senselessness of the order itself. The fact is that at that moment none of

divisions that were part of the 6th Panzer Army, did not wear sleeve ribbons with the names of divisions, since they were removed during the march to Hungary. This measure, as we remember, was dictated by measures to maintain increased secrecy. In March 1945, Sepp Dietrich himself wore similar ribbons, and, perhaps, several other staff officers. During the fighting, even on the maps of the headquarters of Army Group South, units of the 6th Panzer Army were designated by code names. However, on March 18, the measures of heightened secrecy were canceled due to their obvious uselessness. From that moment on, the divisions of the 6th Panzer Army regained their true name on the maps. Theoretically, everyone could again wear their old armbands, but at that moment, actively retreating German tankers were not worried about these problems at all. As a result, only a few senior officers wore sleeve ribbons.

On the whole, this order was referred to in almost all literature as a "moral execution". This could mean only one thing - in the eyes of Hitler, Waffen-SS units ceased to be elite military formations. But the details of this plot have remained unclear. Many former SS officers believed that this punishment was completely unfair and

redundant.

· At the moment when this order was received, the 6th Panzer Army was engaged in defensive battles near the Marzal Canal (lower reaches of the Raab). As Georg Mayer recalled, on March 27, early in the morning, somewhere between 5 and 6 o'clock, an officer of the headquarters of the army group

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Tanks of the division "Reich" at their last frontier - on one of the Vienna bridges

"South" gave him a "lightning" telegram received from Hitler's Headquarters. As many years passed, Mayer found it difficult to convey the exact text of this document, as well as its source data. But its general meaning boiled down to the fact that all divisions of the 6th Panzer Army had to hand over their armbands for failure to comply with orders and for showing cowardice. But Georg Mayer remembered exactly that the telegram was signed not by Hitler, but by Heinrich Himmler. Actually, it is not possible to confirm or refute this statement, since the telegram itself was not found in any of the German archives. Based on all this information, Mayer argued that the true author of this telegram was not Hitler, but the Reichsfuehrer SS. He did not even rule out that Hitler had to order the solemn return of the sleeve patches. Georg Mayer supported his point of view with excerpts from the memoirs of the SS Oberststurmbannführer,

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Waffen-SS Colonel Otto Günsche, who at that time was Hitler's personal adjutant. At one point he described a tense conversation between Hitler and Guderian. This was the very moment when it became clear that the offensive in the Ardennes had failed and the fate of the 6th SS Panzer Army was being decided. Günsche himself wrote on the subject:

"I did not have the impression that the Fuhrer was blaming the failure of the Ardennes offensive precisely on the divisions of the Waffen-SS. But even then he used to say that in the time of Frederick the Great, who, despite the hopelessness of the situation, never lost faith in victory, the emperor demanded

their guard regiments of special stamina and courage. At the same time, he mentioned that Frederick the Great was not afraid to deprive the retreating regiments of their honorary awards and field banners.

That is, Hitler was already obsessed with this idea, he only needed an excuse to put it into practice. A similar occasion was found on March 26, when the words of General Balk addressed to General Wehler reached Hitler: "If the Leibstandarte is not able to hold its positions, then what do you want from us!" Hitler was furious, he shouted that the Leibstandarte (the full name of the Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler) was not worthy to bear his name. Those present on March 26, 1945 at the meeting plunged into deathly silence. When Hitler demanded to deprive the divisions of armbands, Hermann Goering took the floor. He, too, was in disgrace, but nevertheless was not afraid to object to Hitler: "The Waffen-SS, in particular the Leibstandarte, fought bravely from the very beginning on all fronts. In the battles, more than one composition of the division changed. Such a decision is unfair, especially in relation to Sepp Dietrich. But no one supported Goering (or did not dare to support him). Hitler was tensely silent. Finally, he ordered Heinrich Himmler to arrive at the Imperial Chancellery. This happened a couple of hours later. Then Hitler gave him an order that Himmler personally had to address to Sepp Dietrich. At the same time, the Reichsfuehrer SS himself did not stand up for either Dietrich or the 6th Panzer Army. That is how the order was sent to the headquarters of the 6th Panzer Army.

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But in this regard, many questions arose: did the order concern only the Leibstandarte? Or even the "Giletyugend" division, which was part of the 1st Panzer Corps together with him? Or did this apply to all the SS DIVISIONS that were part of the 6th Panzer Army? Did this refer to the IV SS Panzer Corps, which was part of the army group Balka?

It is possible that it was precisely for this reason that Dietrich did not begin to understand the intricacies of this order, but simply did not give him a ho-Sepp Dietrich, the commander of the 6th yes. The fact that the order of the Führer by the SS Panzer Army came with the signature of Himmler did not add the slightest desire to carry it out. The traditional version is that Himmler acted only as a transmission link, a kind of "postman". Despite the fact that the order was not transmitted in parts, rumors about it very quickly spread throughout the divisions, including those that were not part of the 6th Panzer Army. This explains the ridiculous version that Dietrich allegedly sent his awards to Hitler in a chamber pot. This fact was only partially present in the Goetz von Berlichingen division. Some officers (I do not rule out that tipsy) only offered to do this. But the next morning they abandoned the risky undertaking. This explains such a strange detail that the supposedly chamber pot with the awards of Sepp Dietrich was tied with a sleeve, namely, the ribbon of the Goetz von Berlichingen division. Here, as they say, without disassembling, everyone was thrown into one heap.

On March 27, 1945, Sepp Dietrich, according to G. Mayer, nevertheless informed the commanders of tank divisions. They were very outraged. Gille showed a particularly violent reaction (the fact is that General Balk sent him a copy of this order "for review"). In fact, it was an open insult. |

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But the most interesting thing in this situation is that in the combat log of Army Group South there was not a single mention of the incident with the "tape order". But the telegram from Berlin came precisely to the headquarters of Army Group South! The remark that the order concerned only Waffen-SS divisions does not stand up to criticism, since all these divisions were not separate formations, but were part of the army group and were subordinate to its command. Therefore, a note about this telegram should have remained in the journal. No less surprising are the memories of many officers of the Reich division, who claim that they heard about this order only after the war from various sources. This, of course, does not exclude the possibility that the command of the division simply did not transmit the order

parts.

No less strange is the version told in the book by Charles Messenger:

"Dietrich told his Canadian investigator Milton Shulman that at first he got drunk and slept for three hours. "After waking up, I asked myself the question: "Who is crazy - me or them? Noah is not crazy, so they are crazy." He then called his four divisional commanders and, throwing the order on the table, said, "Here is your reward for what you have done in the past five years!" He ordered them not to take off their armbands, and wrote to Hitler that he would rather shoot himself than follow this order.

There are many dubious passages in this story, in particular, none of the surviving eyewitnesses could remember that Dietrich drank after receiving the order.

As a result, in this situation, willy-nilly, one has to rely on the version of Georg Mayer, who was the only eyewitness to those events: "On that strange day, March 27, 1945, I was on duty in the morning. After 5 o'clock in the morning the officer on duty [of Army Group Headquarters] came to me and gave me a "lightning" telegram that had just arrived. Order to take off armbands! I didn't believe my eyes. I felt myself bursting with indignation and anger. I was losing self-control and was already thinking about waking up the chief of staff ar

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missions of Major General Waffen-SS Kremer? Or maybe call the personal adjutant of the army commander, Sturmbannführer Waffen-SS Weiser? And then the door swung open - Sepp Dietrich himself entered the room. I reported to him the morning summary, and then handed him an outrageous telegram. He looked at me intently, as my spiritual confusion did not escape him, but said nothing. When he had read it, he slowly turned away, bent over the card-table, on which he leaned with both hands. In the end, I couldn't see his face. He was so shocked that it took quite a while for him to pull himself together. After a long pause, still leaning over the table, he said quietly in a trembling voice, in which resentment and deepest disappointment were read: "Here it is, gratitude for everything!" Finally he straightened up, turned and looked at me with eyes full of tears. He pointed to the armband, "She'll stay there!" He shook his head as if to drive the thought away from him. Some time later he asked me: "What do you propose to do?" Although I understood that my words might be meaningless, I involuntarily issued the following: "I suppose it is necessary to ask the Headquarters of the Führer, should the thousands of brave Waffen-SS soldiers who fought between Balaton and the Danube lose their armbands?" Sepp Dietrich looked at me knowingly, and then pointed to the telegram lying on the card table: "Do not pass it on in parts. Contact Kremer. When I get back, we'll discuss everything." After that, he held out his hand to me, an uncharacteristic gesture for him. I accompanied him to the car, and he just shook his head. He was heading to the front to the soldiers. Major General of the Waffen-SS Kremer was as shocked as I was. When at 8 o'clock in the morning after the morning report I gave him a telegram and informed him about the reaction of the army commander, he was angry. He turned red with anger. Then we ripped off our sleeves with a paper cutter. He ripped off the ribbon of the "Life Standard", aya - of his last division - "Reich".

The further development of events appears as follows. Then Dietrich visited his divisional commanders, informed them, but forbade them to transmit

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order further. Nevertheless, everyone quickly learned about him, even in the Totenkopf Division, which was no longer part of the 6th Panzer Army. Mayer believes that Army Group South also received the message and passed it on. But, as Otto Kumm reported, this was only for veterans, and there were few of them left. And they experienced a different form of shock. In any case, armbands were removed in all units upon arrival in Hungary. Almost certainly, Dietrich also took off his ribbon, which, moreover, was special, made in gold, and not in silver, like all other members of the Waffen-SS. This special distinction was conferred by Hitler.

The next person to learn about this was Baldur von Schirach, former leader of the Hitler Youth and from 1940 Gauleiter of Vienna. Himmler, who did not want to go further into the fighting zone, summoned Dietrich to Vienna to reprimand him. Von Schirach was present. Hitler demanded by telephone from Himmler to take away the awards of officers of the 6th Panzer Army. Himmler began to protest: "I could go to Lake Balaton to remove the crosses from the dead. A German SS soldier cannot give more than his life for you, my Führer." Hearing this, Dietrich tore his Knight's Cross from his neck, threw it into the corner of the room, and left. One of his adjutants picked up the cross and left after Dietrich. This ended the "mission" of Himmler. This refutes the allegation that Dietrich returned his orders to Hitler. In fact, many of them, including the Knight's Cross with oak leaves, swords and diamonds, are in the possession of Sepp's eldest son, Wolf-Dieter.

AFTERWORD

The battles at Lake Balaton were not only the last offensive operation of Germany during the Second World War, but also a very significant example of how Hitler tried to manage military processes. Characteristic is the statement of Field Marshal Keitel, who for many years was in close contact with the Führer. During the interrogation, he was asked: "How do you assess Hitler's military abilities?" The answer was: "He knew how to find the right solutions to operational problems. He intuitively navigated complicated situations and, as a rule, found a way out of them. No one is not enough."

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Soviet soldiers inspect German equipment on the streets of Szekesfehervar

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needed the practical knowledge to plan military operations. This led to the fact that he either made a decision too late, or could not realistically assess the damage that we would have suffered from his decision." To all this, it was necessary to add his dubious distrust of the General Staff of the Ground Forces, which began to emerge as early as 1942. Indications of this can be found in the memoirs of almost all German generals and field marshals. In many ways, it was this circumstance that predetermined the catastrophic failure of Operation Spring Awakening. If we analyze this operation point by point, then we can distinguish several fatal: for the Germans, errors:

1) Complete disregard for terrain and weather conditions led to a tactical "false start", which was caused by Hitler's obsessive desire to launch the offensive as quickly as possible.

2) The difficult use of tank divisions gave the Red Army a head start, which it took full advantage of by creating a defense line in depth. |

3) As a result, increased demands were placed on the Waffen-SS units, they were expected to perform military miracles, although the forces at their disposal could be competently used only for organizing defensive battles, but by no means for a "fateful offensive - laziness."

4) The command of the Army Group "South" with some frivolity ignored the accumulation of Soviet troops to the south-west of Budapest, starting a completely predictable breakthrough through the Vertesh mountains. |

5) The German generals clearly underestimated the military abilities of the commander of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, Marshal Tolbukhin, who in a critical situation was able to quickly make the right tactical decisions. All this ensured the mobility and maneuverability of the Soviet troops, which were opposed by the German divisions, not only fighting for meters of a useless swamp, but also waiting for days for strategic decisions from Berlin.

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6) The German command turned out to be unable to correctly correlate the time factor, landscape features and available forces. All decisions were made too late, and the German units reached their assigned positions with a fair delay. At the same time, significantly more troops were required to complete each task, as a rule. |

7) When a retreat was necessary from a tactical point of view, which could save the German troops, Hitler's categorical ban was issued, which led to many times greater losses.

8) The constant use of tank units led to the fact that the German tankers, after weeks of continuous fighting, turned out to be so tired that they could hardly "give their best" to their fullest. To all this, the "heterogeneous" use of tank units (without the use of infantry) was added, which significantly reduced the effectiveness of such actions.

In a word, Operation Spring Awakening was planned in a way that military operations should not be planned at all. Added to all these tactical and strategic mistakes was unhealthy competition between individual generals. As a result, there is nothing surprising in the fact that the appearance in Western Hungary, first of the TU of the SS Panzer Corps, and then of the 6th SS Panzer Army, could not improve either the situation in this country or the situation on the Eastern Front in general. However, in this connection it is necessary to note the positive effect for the Red Army and for the Anglo-American allies. A significant weakening of the German positions, on the one hand, along the Vistula, on the other hand, in the Ardennes, made it possible to successfully carry out not only the allied invasion of Germany, but also the Vistula-Oder offensive operation, which ended in the complete defeat of the Reich.

Applications

Annex 1

Army Group "South" as of March 1, 1945 (location from north to south)

The commander is General of Infantry Wöhler.

Chief of Staff - Lieutenant General Grolman.

The head of the operations department of the headquarters is Lieutenant Colonel Bang.

8th Army

The commander is General Craziung. Chief of Staff - Major General Klot. In reserve were:

- 13th Panzer Division;

- 232nd tank training division;

- Panzer division "Feldherrnhalle"; - 153rd Infantry Division.

XXIX Army Corps - 15th People's Grenadier Division; - 101st Jaeger Division.

XXI Army Corps

- 76th Infantry Division;

- 8th Chasseur Division;

- 271st People's Grenadier Division.

3rd Hungarian Army Commander - Colonel General Heslenyi.

IP Hungarian Army Corps

- 711th Infantry Division;

- 96th Infantry Division;

- 1st Hungarian Hussar Division.

6th Army (Army Group Balk) Commander - General of Tank Forces Balk. Chief of Staff - Major General Gedke.

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GU Panzer Corps SS

Commander - General of the Waffen-SS Gille.

Chief of Staff - SS Obersturmbannführer Schoenfelder.

- 2nd Hungarian Panzer Division;

- 3rd SS Panzer Division "Dead Head";

- 5th SS Panzer Division "Viking".

Sh tank corps

The commander is General of the tank troops Breit. - 1st Panzer Division;

- 6th Panzer Division:

- 3rd Panzer Division;

- 356th Infantry Division.

6th SS Panzer Army Commander - Colonel General Waffen-SS Dietrich. Chief of Staff - Major General of the Waffen-SS Kremer.

XXXXIII army corps

The commander is Lieutenant General Kullmer. - 356th Infantry Division (since March 20);

- 92nd Grenadier Motorized Brigade; - divisional group "Feldherrnhalle".

P SS Panzer Corps

Commander - General of the Waffen-SS Bittrich.

- 9th SS Panzer Division "Hohenstaufen";
- 2nd SS Panzer Division "Reich";
- 44th Imperial Grenadier Division "Masters of the Teutonic Order".

[SS Panzer Corps

Commander - Major General Waffen-SS Priss.

- 1st SS Panzer Division "Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler"; - 12th SS Panzer Division "Hitler Youth";
- 23rd Panzer Division.

[cavalry corps

The commander is a general from the cavalry Hartenek. - 3rd Cavalry Division;

- 4th Cavalry Division;
- 25th Hungarian Infantry Division.

H Hungarian Army Corps (west of Balaton) - 20th Hungarian Infantry Division; - Hungarian division "Saint Laszlo".

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2nd Panzer Army

Commander - General of Artillery de Angelis.

Chief of Staff - Colonel Count Nostitz.

In reserve were:

- 92nd Grenadier Motorized Brigade (since March 20).

XXI mountain rifle corps

The commander is General Lantz.

- 1st People's Mountain Rifle Division;
- 16th SS Panzergrenadier Division "Reichsführer": - Streyer battle group.

EHUSH Army Corps

Commander - General Konrad;

- 118th Chasseur Division;
- 71st Infantry Division;
- 13th SS Mountain Division "Khanjar".

Annex 2

Correlation between some German and Hungarian place names

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In early 1945, Hitler made one last attempt to turn the tide of the war and avoid ultimate disaster on the Eastern Front by ordering a large-scale offensive in Western Hungary to drive the Red Army across the Danube, stabilize the front line, and hold onto the Hungarian oil fields. By the beginning of March, the German command had concentrated almost the entire armored elite of the Third Reich in the area of Lake Balaton - the SS tank divisions Leibstandarte, Reich, Totenkopf, Viking, Hohenstaufen, etc. - a total of up to 900 tanks and assault guns.

However, the monstrous blow of the 6th SS Panzer Army, which was supposed to sweep away the troops of the 3rd Ukrainian Front, was met by the most powerful anti-tank defense and did not reach the goal. Subsequently, even the Germans themselves admitted that the Soviet anti-tank artillery acted exemplary in this battle. The ten-day battle ended with a brutal beating of Hitler's last combat-ready reserves - the Germans lost about 400 tanks and up to 40,000 people in the Balaton area. After this crushing defeat, the German army finally lost the ability to conduct offensive operations.

Until now, the domestic reader could judge the Balaton operation only from Soviet sources. In a new book by a well-known historian, this battle is shown for the first time from the German side - having studied all available literature, relying on operational documents of the Wehrmacht and the memoirs of German soldiers and military leaders that have never been translated into Russian, the author analyzes in detail the course of hostilities, examines the tactical miscalculations of the German command, because of which the initially successful operation ended in complete failure, depriving Hitler of his last hopes for a more or less acceptable outcome of the war.

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